

JACK LAWSON, M.P.

A MAN'S LIFE

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THE BLACK JACKET EDITION
FIRST PRINTED IN THIS FORM

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
TO
MY FELLOW MINERS

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORISED ECONOMY STANDARDS

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

SOME of the people mentioned in this book who were living at the time of its first publication are now dead, and the world is in many ways a much changed place.

But those departures and changes do not affect the story or the judgments, and amendment is unnecessary save that I have thought it of interest to add a further chapter—a sketch (but only a sketch) of the years between.

JACK LAWSON.

CONTENTS

I.	ONE OF THE MILLION	-	-	page	7
II.	AN OR-MINER AND A TURN				
	MOTHER	-	-	"	10
	RACE WITH A RACE	-	-	"	15
	THE FIVE AND A HALF	-	-	"	21
	"	-	-	"	27
	"	-	-	"	40
	"	-	-	"	43
	"	-	-	"	51
	"	-	-	"	57
	"	-	-	"	67
	"	-	-	"	71
	"	-	-	"	75
	"	-	-	"	84
	"	-	-	"	89
	"	-	-	"	93
	"	-	-	"	98
XVII.	A NEW VILLAGE	-	-	"	100
XVIII.	THE THREE STRIPS	-	-	"	111
XIX.	THE MINIMUM WAGE	-	-	"	116
XX.	THE BIG MEETING	-	-	"	120
XXI.	THE MAGIC CARPET	-	-	"	131
XXII.	THE N. C. C. S.	-	-	"	136
XXIII.	THE GO OUT	-	-	"	142
XXIV.	THE FOLKS AT TOM	-	-	"	147
XXV.	A GOOD CHARACTER	-	-	"	152
XXVI.	THE ARTISTS	-	-	"	157
XXVII.	THE HOUSE OF COMMONS	-	-	"	160
XXVIII.	IN OFFICE	-	-	"	165
XXIX.	UNEMPLOYMENT	-	-	"	170
XXX.	THE WILL AND FORWARD	-	-	"	174
XXXI.	TWELVE YEARS LATER	-	-	"	179

CHAPTER I

ONE OF THE MEN

ON A SPRING MORNING IN 1853, A MAN OF SOME THIRTY years climbed the steep road that led from the centre of the old town of Wrexham to Ke'ls, a village situated on the heights close to St. Bees Hall. Of average height with fair hair which hung below his cap in curls, the old wire carriages he wore and the sagging of a rill in his walk marked him as a sailor. A closer look at his wrists would have confirmed this impression, for they were much tattooed in sailor fashion. Claws were on his feet and he was dressed in corduroy trousers and rough jacket. Active and well kept, with sharp, intelligent features, he was obviously one of the workers - one of the sailors.

To me he was a great man; he was my father and he was doing a great thing, for he was going to a larger house the rent of which would take a great portion of his scanty wages, and he was leaving the life of the town, which was more congenial to his nature, for the comparative isolation of three short streets facing the Cambrian Range, which runs out there. He would have to climb that hill daily after a long day of physical work in the mine and he was doing this for his children. All this I learned long after, for I was then little more than a year old and I lay in his arms looking up at the white clouds in the setting of blue and at great sweeps of buttercups and daisies in fields of thick green grass. Arrived at the top of the road, or brow, I could see the shimmering, glistening waters of the sea on one hand and the mountain on the other.

A man's life brings him memories so thick that they crowd each other out until only the few more vivid than the rest remain, and I, like others, have such memories, but it has always seemed strange to me how that day

in my second year stands out in my mind. There are times when it is so real that I feel myself cradled once more in those strong arms, with the lofty blue ceiling of heaven above, and under it singing larks innumerable, and the green, white, and gold of the fields, while the scent of the sea and clover possesses me. All the wealth of the modern world could not purchase the luxury of that memory, and it often gives me rest to recall it. Strange it is how dark and grim things are dissolved by time, while the beautiful and kindly things remain with us. I have heard men speak bitter snarling words of dark hungry times in their lives, and I too have then remembered such days and given them my sympathy, but still more vividly I remember the days in that wonder world around Kells when I filled my little stomach with sour dockens and dandelion roots to satisfy a craving which seemed to be always there.

But most of all do I remember that golden day when I left the little two-roomed house in the old part of Whitehaven where I was born, and came to Kells. That is the first day of my life as far as memory goes, for I remember nothing before. When I recently visited the place of my birth, in which there is only one room now, it was as though I had never been there before. And it is beyond me to tell how far that place was from Kells. True, it is only a matter of a mile or two in distance, but it was another world in fact. For a large field with a good-sized hill in the middle was flanked on three sides by the single rows of houses that made up our community. Behind East Row rose the mountains, their colours changing according to the season and the differing lights; wide stretches of country lay to the north and south, and to the west, far below, the waters of the Solway beat against the cliffs.

Those were happy days when I chased the yellow striped bees, or flitting butterflies, sometimes white and sometimes orange and black, and when I played under the hot sun until, tired out, I lay down and fell asleep

in a field, to awake and dream with the ships on the sea—themselves dreams going to distant dream-lands beyond the horizon. But there was a dark frowning castle in the distance beyond the sea. Long, where there lived a castle with a two-headed dragon. I had seen the castle one day when I got lost. I had seen the castle and I had heard the dragon. I had seen the castle giant near the door, but still I knew what they were for, for did I not see the castle with my own eyes, and the dog with my own ears? Long, after I had seen the castle was a man, a large, caped, by a woman, but I have also heard that I was no more to be in my childish terrified imaginations than many grown-up people are in the affairs of life. In these days great value is justly placed on education, and I, who only had a small share of it, rejoice that it is so. But I have often thought that the greatest of all educational forces are the silent, silent forces of Nature, which multitudes of children are denied to-day. For myself, I am certain that those mountains with their rainbow colours, the fields around, the sun on the sea, and the roar of the waves against the cliffs at night when the wind rattled the windows while I was safely snuggled in bed—were the greatest educational forces in my life. If these things become the way and woof of a man, they have more influence than the things about which we read.

But there was another force at work too. When the sun had gone down, taking with it the colour and romance of mountains and sea, and I had to sit in the corner of a bare kitchen waiting, waiting for the meal which, when it did come, scarcely ever seemed to fill, it was then that romance yielded to reflection and the child became very old.

CHAPTER II

Sailor-Miner and Stern Mother

THE DESCRIPTION OF MY FATHER AS A SAILORLIKE MAN may have seemed inconsistent with the statement that he was a miner. This combination of sailor and miner was not uncommon in Whitehaven in those days. There was a time when that port was among this country's greatest and best, and even in my boyhood it was of importance in the world of shipping. But it was in its prime in the days of wooden ships, and all who know anything of the commercial history of this country, and the part shipping played in building up the supreme position we hold in the world, will know that Whitehaven is one of the ports which hold no mean place in the annals of British sailordom. Did not the famous privateer *Paul Jones*, in the name of liberty and the American Revolution, in 1779, add romance to the old port when he ran in and bombarded it, firing the ships, and capturing two forts and thirty pieces of cannon?

At the time, however, of which I write steamers were quickly ousting sailing-vessels. Whitehaven could not grumble, for coal seams were being developed all around, and the men who had sailed the seven seas in old wooden tubs were now producing coal for the modern unromantic steamer. So it had become an axiom in Whitehaven that no sailor was worth his salt who was not also a miner, and no man was a real miner unless he was also a sailor.

My father was a full-blooded product of these conditions. He had been injured in the mine as a boy of nine years, had deserted his ship, been arrested in Liverpool for breaking his apprenticeship articles before he was ten, and been sent back to his mother by the magistrates; had sailed round the world by the time he was eleven and was an Able Seaman at fourteen. Often he would tell me

how he signed on as A.B. at the old shipping office on Tower Hill, London, in his fourteenth year, and how he gasped at the great beautiful ship—the *Beautiful Star*, in which he had to sail—when he saw her lying in Tilbury Dock.

"Why, she was a thousand tonner! he would say—which of course is a mere child's toy to-day. He always boasted he was a deep-sea sailor, no "rock creepers." As to modern sailors—well, they were not sailors at all.

This sea habit of my father's never left him, although he spent a good part of his life in the mine and was always known as a good pitman. None ever placed him as anything else than a sailor of the old-time sort, for even in old age he walked and talked, and looked like, one of Captain Marryat's characters. He had served in the Navy, too, and in my boyhood and youth he would vary his work in the mine with a voyage to distant lands and weeks of Naval Reserve drill every year. When pit-work was slack he went to sea. A miner in the night shift, he would be a Naval Reserve man during the day. He would not be idle. I see him now coming home black from the pit; now returning from sea in sailor's garb with bags of oranges, a parrot, or a monkey. A colourful man was my father, as you realised when you saw tattooed on his breast a ship in full sail, and on his right arm, the Saviour hanging on the Cross with another subject done on his left. Much more did his talk mark him out as an exceptional character. Although he was almost illiterate, he told wonderful stories in choice English—never using a word of dialect. In his last years our local vicar urged me to get him to talk with a shorthand writer at hand, for he said Joseph Conrad never told a better story, or told it better than my father. And it is a fact that in the mine, in a group at the street corner, or in our home men would sit enthralled while he told his tales. As a child I heard them so often that Valparaiso, and other distant places, seemed just round the corner. All unconsciously he was playing the schoolmaster to me, for

he was quickening the mind and touching the imagination. The sea and his travels more than made up for lack of education in earlier years, and I have known few better educated men than my father.

Never an oath crossed his lips. He took his glass of beer occasionally, but I never saw him the worse for it. Insistent on truth and honesty, his world travels gave him a contempt for the small tittle-tattle of the narrower village life. I have an old Bible in which the records of my father's family begin in 1731—all were sailors and whalers, and to many of their names is added "Drowned at sea." His grandfather was a navigation master. If my father did not receive an education, he never blamed anyone but himself for it.

"In those days," he once told me, "we ran away from education; in these days, thank God, they run to it." He was well educated by travel, and had an intelligent mind to benefit thereby. His body and mind were clean and strong, he was a good sailor, a good miner, and a cultured man, though he had hardly read a book. Now, all this I have told that you might understand how fortunate I really was, though our family life was very hard, as it must be where there are so many to feed and so little to do it with. I have spoken at length of my father so that you might understand what a contrast he was to my mother. He was broad-minded, strict in discipline, yet gentle. She was powerful in body, passionate, with a lava-heated, ungovernable temper, narrow-minded, never forgiving an injury or fancied wrong—and they were often fancied. She was absolutely illiterate, and a very dominant woman. The temper of the two often clashed, yet they were a devoted couple—devoted in a very moving way, as I shall show later. If I draw a picture of her which may seem doubtfully dutiful in a son, it is not only because I want to give a faithful portrait, but also because I think it is necessary to a proper understanding of the wild, rugged, forceful personality which alone enabled her to conquer conditions which

would have overwhelmed the weaker mother. For she was a great mother. Her punishments were sometimes unmerited because they were the result of the temper which swept her before it. She was a woman who punished at times almost to the point of bloodshed. She hit her culs with her claw, with the same strength that she fought at the lair with her teeth and claws. She fought to the death for her own. She did the same in her primitive way. She never let her kindness of us that I remember, for her kindness was to her as weakness. Sometimes a scolding would come over her, and these rare moments of attention were with me. She had no words to translate, while she enforced on herself and others that law of battles and no whining, tell the truth, pay your debts, and respect yourself that you need never be ashamed. When I took the blow, and often had to find out for myself what it was for. Perhaps it was from the hand and perhaps it was from the hardest thing he could lay hold of. But let anyone else dare to hurt us, man or woman, and there was trouble. No neighbour who crossed her once ever repeated the mistake. Once, when we had gone to Durham, I was well thrashed by a boy in the same street, and my face bore testimony to it. Stern enquiry by my mother brought out the story, and I was further thrashed and chased out to redeem the family honour. Driven to desperation, I rushed upon the boy in the street and engaged him in such a way that the tables were being turned when I was seized from behind by his father. Kicking and raging, I was suddenly dropped, and rushed into battle again. But in a little while my opponent seemed more interested in something else than me. And on looking round, there was my mother standing toe to toe fighting the boy's father in man style. I can see her now, her dark brown hair rather loose in the coil, with gleaming eyes, and grim, granite-like face, slogging like a regular fighter. The street was out of doors to see the battle; the man was furious at being so exposed, but my

mother's strength and angry attacks engaged him seriously. Never for a moment was I concerned for mother, for to me the fight could only have one end—mother would win, for she had always won. And I was proud of her all-conquering powers. It was a great fight until neighbours interfered and ended it. My mother was Savage by name and she was savage by nature. She came of a race of giants on her mother's side—the Grahams of Cockermouth—famed in Border history as a race of wrestlers. And she was worthy of them, for she wrestled with poverty and hunger that her children might be fed and clothed. When I remember that she brought up ten of us children in days of scanty wages and scanty work, when there was no help in sickness or unemployment, when few cared whether you lived or died; when I remember her almost fierce independence of spirit, and that we all survived strong in body, I am proud of that mother who said to me in her old age:

"I punished you, I was rough, I was ignorant, but I brought you all through safely, and I never did a thing of which any of you might be ashamed."

And I replied: "Mother, there is much education to-day and what men call culture. But there are not many who can show such a record as you; few mothers as good, and none better."

I see her yet, in the Kells days, coming up the steep road from the beach below, where she had been to gather coals to keep our fire going. There she came, body bent, waddling like some strange animal, with a great bag of coal on her back which she had carried more than a mile up a terrific incline. Then I see her when she has reached the allotted span of three score years and ten, gentled by time, humble, proud of her own, outside the fierce arena of life, a real Joan with her Darby in a little miner's home where tender affection and dear delight in each other charmed and held all who beheld them.

And, looking now on the results in the light of long experience, if I had to choose between the mother who is indulgent to the point of softness and my mother's stern discipline and unbridled temper, I would a thousand times over plump for my own mother. But, as I used to tell her in later years when, with a tremble in her voice, she used to boast she had 'walloped me!' 'Yes, mother, and I sometimes think that was the best part of my education." And I think there is more than a grain of truth in that, for discipline is good—well, anyhow, it is often the things we don't like that are best for us.

CHAPTER III

Scraping the Pan

A PLATFUL OF SAUSAGE CURLED ROUND AND POUND IN a little pool of fat. It smelled good and looked beautiful on that plate set on a snow-white tablecloth. Never had I seen such a table, and never so much sausage on one plate. And it was all for me. If Mrs. —, our next-door neighbour, had only given me a liberal supply of fat and plenty of bread to dip in it, I should have thought it a feast, but that plate filled with sausage, set before me, and apparently all for me, held me spellbound. That dinner riveted itself on my six-year-old mind.

I had played with her only boy all the morning. I knew the people next door were rich, for Mr. — worked at the alabaster works, where everybody worked regularly and made a lot of money. I knew that, for the parents dressed like rich people, and their only child, the boy with whom I had played that morning, used to wear a Sunday suit on weekdays. He wore a collar, too, so I knew they were rich. Ordinary boys in Kells wore their elder brothers' suits cut down, with the jackets long

and sleeves down to the knuckles. They wore clogs several sizes too big, to allow for growing feet—and in summer time took them off and hid them, with stockings inside, when away from their parents' eagle eyes. But the — boy's clothes and boots were always the right fit—and, mind you, one must be rich to wear boots through the week. Some boys might get a pair of boots for Sunday's, but to have them for weekdays! For, of course, clogs were cheaper and lasted longer. I had been allowed to play with this boy one morning, then had actually been brought in by his mother to their well-furnished, shining house, to have dinner with him. And there I sat, awed by the house, with a whole plateful of sausage to myself.

None of the great functions which I have since attended, with their riches in meat and drinks and display, not all these put together have made a fraction of the impression upon me as did the dinner set before me that day in a workman's house. No wonder I thought them rich, for the one thing that mattered in those days was to eat. Of course, it is always so with boys; in our house it was the great thing, because the chance came so seldom.

There were seven of us by that time—nine with my parents. To have our bread dipped in bacon-fat for breakfast in the morning was a luxury. Another delicacy was to have bread scraped in the pan. I ought to explain for those lacking experience of this luxury that the pan has once had bacon fried in it—maybe yesterday or the day before. But the bacon has gone and the fat too. The pan has been scraped with bread many times, and is dry now. Nevertheless, if you scraped your bread round and round very hard, you might get a little colour and just a faint taste of it on your bread. Not much bread, and not much colour from the pan. Dinner-time brought the same courses as breakfast—but then the real meal was coming in the evening when father came from work. When we returned from school after four o'clock

we would wait for that dinner, and often we waited long. A boiled potato or two and a mere fragment of red herring was a luxury—and sometimes we didn't get even that. There was some porridge with a little sugar—no milk. Milk in porridge! That would have been almost as wasteful as milk in tea. And we never wasted milk in that way—or any other.

Porridge has been culgised as a great food. People who never would eat it long to feed the nation's children on porridge. I too can wax eloquent on porridge for I know what a luxury it was in boyhood days. I just got enough to leave me hungry, but more often I was hungry and got none. Eating—or the thought of it—occupied my waking hours and troubled my sleep. Often have I sneaked downstairs in the night and prowled round the pantry, groping in the dark, trying to find food. A piece of bread made of some kind of inferior flour was real 'plunder. White bread as we have it to-day was made of 'best' flour, and only kings used that. At least, I thought so. No wonder I grew younger as I grew older, and looked on the world in manhood with younger eyes than in the days of my childhood. For want can mark the gravity of age upon a child's face, and colour the thoughts, so that it sees life through old eyes.

But on Sundays we got a real dinner, as much as we could eat. Sunday was a good day at our house.

Lesser parents would have been beaten altogether by the task of feeding the seven of us under the prevailing conditions. How mine kept us going at all was a mystery to me when I came to manhood and learned the facts of our family exchequer at this period. My eldest brother has told me since how he commenced work at the time of which I write. He had three shillings to take for his first week's work, and my mother, regretted she could not give him a penny for his pocket as father had only ten shillings to take that week. Thirteen shillings for nine of us for a week! But of course the cost of living was less, and wages were not always so small. True;

but how did we live? How did that mother and father survive the drilling duty of bringing ten of us up under such conditions? What slaves to their bairns they were! Mother had come up from the fighting Amazons of the Whitehaven fish-market, and she would go to town and bring skate-backs, which were thrown away as a rule by the fishmonger. She of course got them for nothing, and had great skill in skinning them, so that she made much out of nothing. My eldest brother, before commencing work, would sometimes go out at night with the fishing-fleet to get a few fish, and then go to school all day. Other brothers and sisters sold these fish, going from door to door. When times were bad, and work was slack, father schemed to work as a coal-hewer and a fireman—two jobs together. And mother toiled regularly up the mile-long Jacob's ladder with a great load of coal. I remember the day when I had a shock, which now makes good comedy but then was deep tragedy. I rushed home from school one day to find mother bent over the wash-tub in the yard. At the end of the plain table in the kitchen there lay half a slice of bread, which I promptly swiped and gobbled, only to discover too late that I had a mouthful of soap. It was a square of soap worn thin by much use.

If the world of Nature around, and my father's stories of the seas and distant lands were potent forces in my education, so was this continual gnawing at the pit of the stomach and the epic battle of my parents against the gaunt wolves of hunger. The bitter snarling word has never come easy to me, for they sour a man and his audience, and congeal the thoughts and feelings that are so necessary to lead the people away from such evil things as those of which I have spoken. But I confess I never see a big young family or a woe-begone youngster but I am instantly transformed into reach-me-downs and clogs, waiting, waiting silently in a corner of that house in Kells for the meal which was so long in coming. A great national character said his mother disciplined him

to cry softly, but we learnt to endure greater pain without even whimpering. And in this great rich world, even to-day, it is still so.

I had commenced school at three years of age. My first education was received at the old Glass House School—a National School—which is situated at the bottom of Monkraiy Brow. Although the memory of the school is hazy, I had learned to read very well by the time I was—well, I hardly remember when I could not read. And that marked a great difference between my generation and that of my parents for in their day only the fortunate ones were able to read. It was the question of that simple art of reading, which began the battle against unnecessary poverty, and laid the table for rulers and statesmen of to-day. If all who required the art would cultivate it, how much easier would the world run, and how much happier would it be. I arrived at six or seven years of age at that point where many grown-up people stop to-day. It was my duty to read for hours all the grim tragedies, trials, and accounts of hangings to my mother. No fairy-stories or books were to be found in our house until I brought them in myself in later life. Is it strange that the chief place in my own house since I married should have been given to books, and that shelf upon shelf of them should be all around me while I write this? It was food that mattered in my childhood, and how can one buy books when bread is so hard to come by?

But I little knew, as I read to my mother hour after hour, week by week, that I was learning to articulate, to emphasise the dramatic, and that I was also learning the ways of mankind and the evil that is in the heart.

At that time I was stunted and twisted in body, but very active. So much so, that my climbing and general bravado brought me on one occasion a broken arm, and on another a broken leg. It was a saying of my father that I would never walk on a road if I could get a chance to walk on a roof. But I think he was secretly proud of

this, for when he thus talked he would always go on to tell how one day when he was reefing a topsail, etc., etc. And you may guess that I was secretly dreaming of the time when I too would reef the topsail, whatever that may be. If there had been topsails when I grew up, I certainly would have learned to reef them, but when later on I went to the port to get a ship there was nothing but huge ugly funnels, so that all the romance of ships as I had conceived it seemed to have passed away for ever. Industrialism may spell progress, but it destroys lots of the poetry of life.

It was in those days at Kells that we had as a regular visitor an elderly woman who was the representative of a period in our history which now seems so far away that we can hardly believe it ever existed. This woman was born in 1831 and commenced work about the pits at eight years of age. She always impressed herself on my child mind as a "pitman," but I am told she never worked underground. She still, however, continued to work on the surface of the mine driving a huge horse, riding astride it, while it pulled wagons to and fro on the surface railway. And she continued to do this until the time of her death in 1899. She was more a man than a woman in both habit and appearance. She wore a cap, muffler, jacket, and waistcoat—and a skirt. She drank her pint and smoked a pipe. Her voice was mannish. Her face was masculine. Yet, manlike as she was in appearance and habit, she was still very much a woman, for she would fondle and clasp me to her in the way of a very tender and affectionate motherly person. I remember well how she turned fear of her to love, and how eagerly I looked forward to her visits. Perhaps it was the mother-love denied her which was finding expression. At any rate, I remember my childish anger when I heard the men around me joke and conduct themselves as though she was some uncouth man, for I knew that she was a very gentle woman.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEA-BOY

FAR OUT ON THE ROCKS HE SAT, SO SMALL THAT HE WAS hardly distinguishable to those who sauntered along the sands, which had dried long ago under the heat of the sun, now apparently sinking into the sea. So still was the boy that he seemed as fixed as the rocks around, and one might have passed close by without seeing him. There was something of age in the small face, a hint of premature gravity. White, bristly hair beginning well back from the temples emphasised the apparent thinness of a leanish face. His old clothes had obviously been the property of one older and bigger than he, and his coat had certainly not been made to measure. He seemed, as he looked seawards, to be almost un-seeing.

Dark sails of fishing-boats stood out against the sky, ships were silhouetted, and away on the skyline trailing smoke told of more unseen ships. But such details were lost on the boy, for he was lost in the whole of them. Always he had seen these things, and ever they had drawn him. This range of dun and black slunning, shipperv rocks had always been part of his playground. He loved to go out when the tide was low, gathering shellfish, exploring the clear pools, listening to the cry of the gulls, and dreaming in that detached world which the sea uncovered for a short time. To-night the wonder of it all was fresh as ever upon him as he sat dreaming, seeing nothing yet seeing everything. To-morrow he was leaving it all to live among strange people in a strange place. The new and unknown drew him, but these things held him. So he sat in that world of rocks and sea lost in his dream-world.

The painter would entitle this "Portrait of Self," for I see myself clearly sitting on those rocks, dreamily con-

scious of sea, ships, sky, and gulls, and falling out of this dream-world with a crash as my father's voice brings me back to reality.

"Did you not hear me? I'm hoarse with shouting. It's a good job we're leaving here, or as sure as God's in heaven you would get caught with the tide some day."

As though I'd been caught committing a crime, I jumped, whirled, and slipped, then up again, and began slithering my way across the rocks, working wide of father.

"Why did you want to be here at this time of night? It's eight o'clock, and you know we have to be away soon in the morning."

"I didn't know what time it was."

After that we silently worked our way over the rocks.

Then mother's voice :

"Where's thoo been ? "

"Out."

"I know thoo's been out, but——"

Mother grabbed me by the collar, and I anticipated good things to come. But not this time.

"Get t' bed," she said as she flung me away from her.

I went. Though I was very young, I had learned to "jump to it" long before that time.

But they say a certain place is paved with good intentions, and a youngster who used to come to our house was always singing something about us all having to "go through the mill, you know." Just a little later I went through the mill.

Up the stairs came mother, two at a time, to the room where most of her family lay on two shaky downs. That ominous rumble on the stairs brought sudden silence, but it availed nothing. Long days of worry over ways and means for the "move," and a day or two packing, with a family like ours to handle in the meantime, would test the strongest nerves. Mother had just needed this to touch off her explosive nature. She landed among us, clothes were torn off ; a leather strap swished and crackled

against our bare bodies. Screams, and a shrill voice mingled :

"Shut up now. Shut up or, by——, I'll——"

"Lisbeth, Lisbeth, control yourself," shouted father as he entered the room.

"Thou's as bad as them. If they would take them through hands I wouldn't hev it t' do s' onen, cried mother.

"That temper of yours will get you into trouble some day."

"Get downstairs and mind thee own business." She turned to us again. "Shut up now. Another whimper and I'll——"

Like magic there was silence, for experience had taught us no warning ever came twice from that quarter.

In the faint light of a candle which my father held mother looked as formidable as she had sounded a few minutes before. Powerfully built, strong jawed, though she had borne eight of us, she was still steel strong.

"Nobody would suffer more than you if you did some of them harm. You should control yourself," said father, as he stood in the bare room.

Mother was silent now. Passion had passed as suddenly as it had boiled up. That was her way. They were really a striking pair—striking in their contrasts. And they were a great pair. Unlettered, unknown, herculean workers, magnificently achieving without the least consciousness of their magnificence. Just to feed and clothe their children. One passionate, the other gentle, but both instinctively showing set, stony faces where charity was suggested.

One thing they had in common—a capacity for toil, a relentless driving will to work ; a stiff pride in this thing which was never expressed, but taken for granted. Each was conscious of the other's possession of the thing they respected ; but neither ever spoke of it. Tacit esteem for each other's qualities—that was the nearest they came to

affection. And that esteem stood the test of the years, ripened and mellowed by time until it turned to an unspoken tenderness towards each other which was all the more moving because it was shy of the ordinary observer.

We boys and girls in our family were always secretly proud of their qualities and character. We didn't think of it in that way, but we instinctively knew they were "somebody" in our social world. Certainly they were esteemed for their qualities, as I learned when I grew older. And such parents at the bottom of the scale are more valuable than many at the top. Indeed, as far as values are concerned those at the bottom are often, from the point of national value, really the top. Who among those at the top could have done my mother's job as well as she? Dynamic, explosive, illiterate, she was a Viking on the sea of working-class life, and only her hardy, fearless, tireless spirit could have weathered the storms, thrived on hard tack, and brought the crew safely to port without damage to a single member. She was an aristocrat of the Unknown, and this is the aristocracy upon which a nation stands or falls. And, because of her, I have ever been a bigoted, prejudiced adherent of my own order, the great Unknown.

So we left the house in the cobblestoned street of Kells, where we had lived some six years. I little thought that day that I would not see it for thirty years. Neither did I think that the centre field would be covered with block upon block of houses, and that a great mine, with its steel gear, would have obliterated that field in which I traced the larks to their nests, or lay and watched the white fleecy clouds in the sky until I fell asleep, lost to sight in the long grass. That mine is the Haig Pit of tragic memory, where my brother Tom and his sons now work. As I looked on the changed aspect of the place I longed for the old clean sweet earth as I had known it—and thought it more desirable despite the hungry days.

We moved to Flimby, which was between Maryport and

Wilmington. Flimby at that time had little more than two streets, with some good-sized middle-class houses in addition—though there was High Flimby beyond. Our house was one of those in a street called "The Bucks"—or, as it is still called, "The Bucks". It was a black-brown house—thick, it had a high chimney at the back. There was a parlour, a living-room, and two small rooms with an attic above. There were a water-closet for us with my mother and father, and where we boys put ourselves at night would have puzzled a school-teacher. I know four of us boys slept in one bed—two at the top, and two at the bottom. And we didn't think anything of it, for we slept all right. Why not show what you can do when you must.

Those Flimby people were a kindly lot. We were a small family of famines, and, what is more, the whole family was adopted—nay, we were enfranchised—from the moment we set foot in the village. Mary White kept the keys of all the vacant houses, and she had lit the fire and even prepared a meal on a table she had set down in the kitchen against the time of our arrival. The cart had no sooner arrived than our scanty furniture was huddled in and set properly in place by the men of Flimby, some of whom brought great quantities of blackberries until we had a big deep bread mug almost full. Others brought fish, and even a rabbit was handed in, for the men of Flimby were great fishermen and poachers.

I was very happy that night, for I had never seen so many good things in our house at once; and I still think to the feeling of warm kindness with which we strangers were greeted that day. And when I crossed the road and the railway and discovered that we practically lived on the sea-shore—why, I almost forgot Kells.

Let me say at once that the hungry days were almost ended when we entered Flimby, for two of my brothers, Dick and George, were now working in the mine. Dick was a hewer at sixteen years of age, a man when he was a boy; George a driver in the pit.

"Pioneers, oh, pioneers!" as Whitman would say.

The elders of a big family always pay. It is astonishing how a little helps at such a time. Struggle to make ends meet there still was; clothes and clogs were still sometimes just out of reach; but hunger as we had known it was left behind. We had indeed entered the Promised Land, though there are those who would have regarded it as being more promise than anything. As often as possible we boys and our elder brothers would go down to the shore to set our baited lines, and in the morning we went down barefooted to get the fish which had been caught during the night. There is no breakfast as sweet as a fish just brought from the sea, especially when you have been out on the shore to seek your own. And in those days I sometimes got a small fish all to myself. So you will understand the progress we had made. Then, several families had combined their savings to buy a boat of their own, and there were quite a number of these. When the fishing-season was on, the communal wash-house was scrubbed out, ready for the skate and cod which were dumped there.

At such times anyone who wanted just went and brought away what they needed as long as it was fresh. A peculiar thing about the Flimby people at that time was that no one would eat an eel, which were fairly common on that coast. They seemed superstitious in this matter. But there was no such superstition in our family. We were amused and delighted when we discovered this prejudice against eels, and, though the good people were doubtful about letting us do ourselves harm, we got all the eels we could and risked the penalties.

At Flimby I learned a little at school for which the fee was threepence a week, though I cannot remember much that impressed me about the school. That was certainly not the school's fault, for it was too near the shore and woods to which I have always been attracted. I learned to my surprise at Flimby that rabbits did not properly belong to the man who owned the woods and fields. At

any rate, nobody in that village believed it, and both the gamekeepers and policemen seemed to think there was something in it, for rabbits in the season certainly were our wine occasionally.

Then there was a war between the miners and the landowners, whose business it was to fence the land and to claim all timber and the right to hunt. Whenever there was a war it was a time when the men and woman and boys and girls, before, under the eye of that coastguard. Once some casks of better than good things came ashore. Before the new coastguard was invented the landowners were generous miners, whose generosity was made possible by spontaneous contributions of copper and silver, which they could ill afford, but were ready and even eager to give for the cause. By the time that coastguard had been put on the beach was clean, and, though it was a time when the secret men from the foreign countries were threatened, the village remained unperturbed and undisturbed. I never read or heard of such a quiet, law-abiding people who seemed to be so little troubled about the law. They seemed to think laws were a fairly necessary, that they were made for some wicked people somewhere, but certainly the people of Flimby were not reproach.

CHAPTER V

Boldon Colliery

AFTER A YEAR AT FLIMBY WE MOVED ON TO THE COUNTY of Durham, where my father and two brothers had gone some two months before and worked until they could get a house. The day my mother and our family travelled from Flimby to Boldon Colliery, in Durham, I felt in-

distinctly the great difference between an agricultural country and one which is purely industrial, the difference between small- and large-scale production. When one who has spent his years in the country and by the sea finds himself amongst great aggregations of steel erections and chimneys, something closes up within. Is it the submersion of the personality? With me, though only nine years old, it began, as I well remember, as we were entering Newcastle in the train on that Saturday morning. It seemed as if millions of hammers were beating a tattoo in the shipyards and works around the city.

When we came to Boldon Colliery, the sense of that closed-in-ness increased for I had lived my life up to this time in little more than single-street communities where there was always not far off the sea and wide-stretching country, woods, and distant mountains. We now found ourselves in streets which seemed to my childish eyes miles long, an endless number of streets, every house and every street alike. They were of a very common red brick type, instead of the stone houses to which we had been used. Barracks, barracks everywhere, and noisy, bustling life. That closing-in feeling within, that sense of submergence and nothingness which I first experienced when we left the rural parts behind us and approached Newcastle, was completed on our arrival at Boldon Colliery. For, although that was forty years ago, Boldon was and still is one of the great, outstanding, up-to-date collieries. It had two thousand workmen then, and a community of at least ten thousand men, women, and children connected with the mine. It was a mass-production colliery, a rationalised concern long before the word was coined.

I emphasise this experience because it is so real that I am convinced that modern industrialism presents a problem as deep and urgent as the economic problem—one that is subtle, and affects the personality of men or women. It is well known that the body and brain of the

rolled himself so completely in the bedclothes that you were left naked and unashamed. If it was dark and winter-time, then there was a tug-of-war in which the clothes suffered, or a battle and howls from the wounded which brought father to the bottom of the stairs with threats and promises of what would happen in the morning. If it was my mother who interested herself in the matter, we thought ourselves lucky if she waited until the morning, for she never threatened—she acted.

The kitchen of our house was dining-room, drawing-room, bathroom, wash-house, and bakery. Sometimes the new baked bread made it fragrant, but more often it smelled of sweaty pit clothes—sour and something more. When the clothes were not heaped in a corner beside sweat-sodden shoes they were hanging up beside the fire to get ready for the next day.

The colour-scheme of the house was quite simple—black and brown ; the first the enforced colour of our trade on the clothes, and the other on the furniture for utility purposes. A wooden seat near the fire, put there by the colliery company to whom the house belonged, a few chairs, a wooden settle, my parents' bed in the corner, a canvas-covered floor, and roses on the wallpaper. That was home. And when all the ten of us were there it was indeed "home, sweet home." We may have loved it, but we cleared out as soon as we could for as long as we could. But mother and my elder sister had to live there all the time, day and night, year in, year out. And how they worked ! Clean ! They rubbed and scrubbed, washed and dusted, from morning until night. Give them a chance at the week-end holiday, or during a strike, and its cleanness was terrifying to us youngsters, who brought in our share of muck. But when the pit worked, the cleaning started again as soon as it ended ; and what purpose it served, with the Lawson regiment marching and counter-marching through the house I never could understand.

If you want heroism, go to such homes and such mothers. Patience, fortitude, selflessness is there in full measure, pressed down and running over—though the person concerned would neither understand the meaning of the words nor why they should be used in respect of them. When I grew to years of understanding I vowed that the wrestle and risk of the pit was infinitely preferable to life in that kitchen. The foolish philosopher who claimed that war was necessary as the parent of courage should have lived in our house, and millions like it, and he would have been a wiser man.

But the growing girls could now lighten mother's task a little. Why, she even had leisure enough to cuddle and "make of" her last-born—my youngest brother. That was a luxury for her and a thing to amuse us. She did it surreptitiously until she forgot herself. If she considered she had been caught in the act, she would become very stern with us, evidently considering it a weakness. But this weakness for baby Willie she could not conceal, and all his life she showed him that tenderness and affection which none of us older ones had ever known. It was as though she had to wait until the end of motherhood before she had leisure to love. Through all her life, to all of us she had been steel and flaming wrath, and now in this one case she was a new woman. To all the rest of us she was grim, dominating, but to Willie tremendously affectionate. How kind the veil that hid the tragedy which the future years held. Meanwhile mother nursed her baby, sitting at dinner with my father and two elder brothers, or held him under one arm while she served with the other. When they were finished, we younger ones fed while our elders bathed in the big tin bath on the centre of the floor.

The men would talk of the day's work. All of us, boys and girls alike, knew the technical pit terms as well as if we worked there. Sometimes father would tell the house what he thought of Gladstone's latest speech, while he swept the soap-suds over the full-rigged ship tattooed on

old law of the colliery woman urging her to see us out—for it might be the last she would see of us. It is not wise, but it is womanly, and is based on grim, sad experience. And, just as she saw us out, so there was cooking and preparation for the men and boys coming in. The pit-woman's work never ends. My two elder brothers were by this time, to some extent, above the battle. Their ten hours' work in the mine was enough for them. It was their lot, with my father, to blaze the trail of life for us behind them, and they could tell tales enough to fill a book as to the shifts they made to make money from their schooldays onward. My eldest sister slaved with mother day and night, washing, baking, mending, making, and cleaning. True, there was little dusting of furniture, for there was hardly any to dust. I've never been very keen on antique furniture, for I was too familiar with it in boyhood; what we had was antique—as that was all we could get. And it was all hard and solid. I remember as yesterday how we got a second-hand easy chair when many of us were grown up and things were getting easier. An easy chair! When we got a chance we sat in the chair with all the solemnity and secret exhilaration of a person going for a first ride in an aeroplane.

Moreover, we got more food now, so why worry about easy chairs? And we had joined the Store—The Co-operative Society—so we were getting to be really respectable members of society. There were some very ordinary people who dealt with one or more small dealers who came round with carts. We knew they got their groceries "on tick," though we pretended we didn't know this. But when we joined the store, that respectable society's cart came to our door regularly and proclaimed to all the world that we were real *bona fide* members who paid for our groceries and looked the world in the face. We received our dividend at the quarter's end, and didn't we youngsters know weeks before when it was to be paid! For a little something came our way out of it. A cap,

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about it. Like a good sergeant-major, she commanded you by her silence. Still, I sometimes made a little of myself out of these business expeditions, so I began early as an economist and a profit-making capitalist. And if the reader will forgive me stating a plain fact, I knew a good deal more even then about "self-help" than Samuel Smiles, though he was a great man who wrote a book about it, while I was a little toes-out-of-boots ragamuffin who could never keep his stockings up.

Boldon Colliery was at that time a typical example of the way in which the county of Durham had become a sort of social melting-pot owing to the rapid development of the coalfield during the nineteenth century. Its population consisted of people from every part of the British Isles, some of the first generation and some of the second, all boasting they were Durham men, though their parents spoke the dialect or had the accent of the distant place of their birth. Many of my Durham friends may not know it, but the fact is that, although we are all now Durham men and proud of it, not all of us by any means are native to the soil. Few can trace far back to a Durham lineage. True, the immigration slowed down, and then stopped in the early years of the twentieth century. Marriage and time have now almost obliterated the old county and national landmarks, and made them one people. But at the time of which I write there was a combination of Lancashire, Cumberland, Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Cornish, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Northumbrian, and Durham accents, dialects, and languages. All these and more tongues were to be heard in a marked way; and not only that, but the families in each group gravitated together and formed a common bond. While we were all good neighbours, I have seen the clans come together in my boyhood days and fight it out in very rough and ready style. If anyone thinks the blood bond does not matter, let them live under such conditions and their theory will be strained, to say the least of it. While in my boyhood lines of division existed in Boldon, as in all the

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Our religious persons on one hand were not at all satisfied with the result, and on the other the English Northmen began with a small percentage of opposition to vote Cumberland and Lancashire people, and behind Wales, Cornwall, and Ireland were represented. There were whole masses of Cumbrians, particularly from the north of the birth.

It was a polyglot population. I felt that I was so marked among the children, but that I was not so among the elders. It may be guessed that I came as second nature to me, and indeed, it is now my native dialect, and I love it for its power of expression; but I have also retained the broad dialect of the Cumbrian, and can use it when necessary, as a swimmer retains his art even when he is afraid he has lost it through disuse. Two things made a great impression on me in those early days—they were the beauty of those houses with their air of comparative comfort, and the trim neat dress of the boys and girls. Both definitely marked a higher standard than that to which I had been used. Time has taught me that the housewives of the two northern counties are the best in the world. Housewifery is such a great virtue with

them that it has almost become a fault, for the woman will do herself things to which she is entitled and will wear out to the bone in order to make the house comfortable and shining. If cleanliness is next to godliness, then the women of Durham and Northumberland are close neighbours with the Almighty. Long practice and tradition have made these women so perfect in the art of making a commonplace house beautiful that one must see it to believe what good taste and industry can accomplish. Exceptions there are, of course, but the rule is as I have stated. And this wonderful standard of their home life has played a very important part in the education of the northern miner as well as raising the general standard of character. For a home-loving man strives to give his barns a chance; he is a good workman because he wants money for this purpose, and for the same reason cuts out habits that interfere with his object. Women have been very powerful educational forces indeed in the northern counties. In my lifetime I have seen women, religion, and education perform miracles in the personal life of the miner. For I remember well the old gross, gambling, drinking type beside which we are a model to-day, in spite of the intemperance still prevailing.

And there was certainly room for improvement. As boy and youth I was familiar with, and, as far as gambling mattered, was directly concerned in, scenes which are not good to recall. Drinking was so obviously devastating in its effects that, although the widespread gambling fever laid hold of me from boyhood up to early manhood, wild horses could never bring me to drink. It was in those days so repulsively gross, that the state of things to-day is like voluntary teetotalism compared with forty years ago. So the reader will understand that for me it was as though the world was turned upside down when my parents moved from a small, settled, almost leisurely community in the open country, to this great, changing, many-tongued colliery, with its feverish industrialism, with its great agglomeration of long streets and high awesome pit gear,

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Strike

"LAWSON, WOULD YOU LIKE SOME BREAKFAST?"

"Yes, sir—um—um—no, sir."

"Now, now, you want some, don't you?"

"Y—no, sir."

"Now go over and Mrs. Cousins will give you some thing hot."

And wouldn't I just have liked to go over and have something hot. But I stood irresolutely before the master, my heart over there in his house but certain that my body must go back to my place at the desk. For if I went for breakfast it would certainly come to my mother's ears, and then—well, the breakfast wasn't worth it. But did I not want it? Go through a three months' strike as one of a dozen in the home, and so if you want a breakfast!

It was springtime in 1892, and the time of what is known in Durham as the "Three months' strike." The coalowners had demanded a ten per cent. reduction. The men had stopped work on March 12th. Every wheel in the great coal-producing county was stopped, and the water was flooding the mines. Grim, desperate, savage, the men and women had fought for months. All unconscious of it, I had even as a boy of eleven become class conscious. A national strike is a calamity, and arouses strong feelings, but a county strike is savagely bitter because its effects are more directly devastating. At any rate, in a national strike the world knows and cares a little, but in that 1892 strike, isolated, with the rest of the coalfields in full swing, it seemed as though we were forsaken and forgotten by God and man. And as the sense of defeat deepened, passions rose until women and children were as bad as the men. Indeed, the women

were the worst, as they always are, on a strike action. The women of the coalfields watch an approaching industrial storm with fear and quaking for they know what it means to them. As soon as the pay stops, savings go to the wall, and the children are sent to school. The men are then sent to the pits. When the strike is broken, then the women are left with the children and everlasting damage to their health. They will not retreat an inch. And we must not think of a compromise.

And at this stage we had the children in the mine, my kindly schoolmistress. My mother had tried to give some breakfast. The children went out to roight the towns and country with their little backs to the wind, full of bones and sinews, and they were full of life. They came in from other coalfields, but the women of the coalfield compared with the men. We went to the Miners' Hall with our fathers and brothers. They could not take bread and butter, but they could take other things when they were there. But often they were not there. Then what happened in that family of twelve? All I will say is that I can feel the pull of the proffered breakfast to this day. I did know it was our habit. For three months we turned the old waste-heaps over for a little bit of coal, the fire going, watched hungrily for the carts to come in, and went to the Miners' Hall but the food that sometimes wasn't there.

My father was a good trade unionist, as he was also a good workman. The best workman is always a good trade unionist. My father was strong principled in such matters. He expressed himself freely in the home, but never spoke in the meetings which he regularly attended. He paid his dues, attended union meetings as part of the business of his work, and let it end there.

Mother was a root-and-brancher too. No surrender. She who had spent her years pinching herself to save a penny to make ends meet, whose life had compelled a carefulness that would have been miserly had it not been

to the end of reeding and clothing her brood—she was among the most passionate fight-to-the-enders. All her battling, wrathful spirit rose up against the proposed wage reduction, and her insistence on “no surrender” was in inverse ratio to her fear of the strike at its beginning.

I liked that school at Boldon, and have very grateful memories of the headmaster and teachers—especially one George Gray, who has now retired. He was an artist at getting a lesson home, and one who could secure discipline. He was an uncertificated teacher, but divinely endowed to teach, and many there are in all parts of the world who think of him with gratitude and affection. I remained under him until I was twelve years of age, and gained much thereby. In the three years there I became a fully qualified, admitted Durhamite, and wore boots of a sort—though my elder brothers’ old suits, which had sometimes seen service in the pit, been washed, cut, and mended, still clothed me. But I now belonged to Durham. The stages of initiation into the mysteries of citizenship had been slow and painful. The ceremony itself was neither mysterious nor secret. It was performed in stages in an open field in a ring made by the boys of the school. I was no fighter when I went there, neither did I want to fight. But I wore clogs, spoke a strange dialect, was a foreigner, and, whether I wanted to or not, I had to fight. This happened so regularly that I was almost disappointed after a time when I got home without a little excitement in the field. My elder brothers were in the same position. All of us could wrestle better than we could fight, for you learnt wrestling early and often in Cumberland. I once watched with delight my elder brother fighting. All that happened repeatedly was that the other youth’s heels went up in the air and the earth came up to knock the wind out of him. He claimed, of course, that it wasn’t fair fighting. Of course, the Cumberland “buddick” is a mysterious thing in other parts, but it is fair enough. And I think the crowd rather liked this new performance. My

in the mine that day. Dark and cold as it was, I would have sprung out of bed and gone downstairs with a rush. But I knew that would be very boyish, and would bring the arrows of scorn upon me from my older brothers. "You'll get more than you want of the pit, me lad." Always my enthusiasm had been met with more than one wintry douche from these mature, too experienced philosophers.

So I restrained myself, and lay listening to mothers in the houses at each side calling their sleepy lads. Then from the bottom of the stairs came my mother's voice:

"John, John-n. Dick. George. Come on, lad."

I rose and put on my school trousers, which were now to serve for the pit, and went downstairs. Mother had laid breakfast and was busy making up our "bates," or meals for the pit. The "bates" were carried in linen bags attached to thick tape and carried on the shoulder. My two elder brothers came more leisurely downstairs and dressed slowly as they sat on the seat before the fire. We doused ourselves under the tap, and sat down to breakfast, during which I got much advice and many warnings. "Keep to your door. I was to start, like all others, as a trapper—opening and shutting doors for the drivers. "Don't let them have your lamp."

Now how could I do without a lamp in the pit? I soon learned, for it transpired that a trapper was more often in the dark than otherwise. I promised to obey all the instructions—but I did wish my advisers would finish their breakfast. I wanted to see that Aladdin's Cave called the pit. That half-hour seemed a lifetime. But at last we were off, making our way through the colliery on a wintry morning at ten minutes to six. The ring of heavy shoes could be heard all around us. Not a light was there, for we didn't waste money on street lamps in those days. Vaguely outlined groups and individuals emerged from other streets as we passed along,

all converging on the pit. The big catwalk with its lines of small bright burning lamps looked vast and busy to my very young eyes when we arrived. We called a number, and a lamp was flicked out to us, which we held aloft so that it was visible to the lower level. The shaft was dark, but the light from the lamp we were given at that time, and the light from the other lamps, though it was a soft, hazy glow, made it possible to see the lamp-caten to the pit. I felt the great depth of the lamp from extending the ground beneath our feet. We mounted what appeared to be a platform, and stepped and worked our way up to the top of the shaft. The way on the heavy metal platform was a narrow strip of boys and girls were standing close together, waiting to go down. Strange that the children who were to go down rather than up the shaft were the gloomy, silent ones, the prospect of their descent in that darkness and noise and risk of accident made them look below.

The pit-head on which we stood was a vast structure of steel. Powerful supports reached to the pulleys away up beyond the roof that overhung the working part of the surface. The platform on which we stood was steel. There was steel everywhere. We were surrounded by it. We could hear it in the crashing, rolling, tapping and rattling. We saw the thick, glistening, steel-like ropes sliding up and down the shaft and the steel chains emerging, heralding the coming of the steel cage which carried the iron shaft gates upward in its flight. I shrank inwardly in the midst of that great organisation, and once more that sensation of "closed-in-ness" came back anew, making me feel even smaller than I was. But the lure of the pit did not diminish in the least. Its mystery called and drew me like a magnet, and I was thrilled when at last I found myself, with some forty others, sliding slowly and silently down the deep shaft. The slimy beams at the side, the black depths I could glimpse,

and the flashing lights of a seam we passed, all held me steady. I found myself standing in the glare of the work lamp almost as soon as we had left the darkness. It seemed to me.

Our lamps were tested by an official, and a driver was told to take me in as his trapper. He took me away into the dark road beyond where a steel rope hummed, rollers whirled under it, and long lines of coal-laden tubs roared past while I flattened myself against the coal-side of the tub into which my guide and protector pulled me. Then on we went to the stables where a score of boys were milking, were getting their ponies. Many of the boys were only a few months older than myself, yet I was the eldest of them. They were sent down here, where they would work as hard as I was at their own level, and the shop-keeper said they took the full value of what they were doing. It was their right, as I could see from other miners' lives later on. About a quarter of eight I was taken down to my door, and had supper. My trapper's lamp was taken from me, and I was left alone. I got all I wanted of the mystery of the mine during the few hours I spent in the dark that day. I even ate my meal in the dark, and washed it down with water from my tin bottle, for which I had to grope some time before I could find it. That was a long, long day, when all the day was night, and I was profoundly pleased when it came to an end. I worked ten hours that day, and my pay for it was tenpence.

Still I was a man, and I knew it. There was no more drudging at home. I was entitled to as much meat as I wanted and others were cleared out to make a seat for me. Even mother slightly deferred to me, was distantly kind and bought me ready-made clothes. No more older brothers' reach-me-downs, or cast-off boots. I sat up to the table with my elder brothers and father, black from pit, paraded my knowledge of pit technique, and generally tried to live up to my newly acquired status.

But I was no model boy, for from the moment I began to get a few coppers as pocket-money I had a passion for the "gambling school." From twelve to twenty years I would gamble my shirt. In this way I was a man before I had left boyhood. And I thought it looked big to "plunge," doubling my bets every time, until, as a nipper I was among grown men throwing for large sums. I have plunged and won when I was barely sixteen until ten pounds have been lost or won by me on one toss of the pennies. Even at that time I would adjourn to a public-house with men and spend freely—because it looked well. But no drink ever passed my lips; I was granite on that, foolish as I was in other matters. Of course, the men ought to have slapped me and sent me home, but, mentally, they were no older than I was. Reproof I received at home, but I was bringing money in as a miner and therefore was a man. And when mother tried to be her old dominant self, she looked at me—and saw herself. For any strength of body or of mind I have, or any virtues are hers—the vices are my own. Generally, speaking, all the respectable people would have voted me then as running direct for hell. And it is true that there was no rough life in the colliery but I was there. We blocked the streets with our games of "shinney"; we yelled at the corner end when we gambled, dodging policemen and defying decent men; with orchard owners and gamekeepers we were at daggers drawn. To everyone we were a nuisance, and good people considered that the gallows would ultimately get us. Now all this I frankly tell that you may understand the great change that has come over colliery life, and what a strange creature I was.

From boyhood I read like a glutton. True that for a year or two they were only *Union Jacks* or *Marvels*, and Frank Reade's airships gave me tales which I really believed. Still, they were merely ahead of their time, for, though boys laughed when I recited Frank Reade's adventures as facts, grown men now believe much wilder tales.

For they are now sober fact, and are related in the morning newspaper. Which proves that fact is often really stranger than fiction. But, then, it is only twenty odd years ago since the first airman startled the world by flying over the Channel. About the first weekly that I got hold of told the adventures of a certain Jack Harkaway, and I must say I've never enjoyed myself as much either before or since. But by the time I was fourteen I had got hold of Dickens at the Miners' Institute, which was then nothing more than two pit-houses knocked into one. And didn't I follow the literary trail, once I found it! Like a Fenimore Cooper Indian, I was tireless and silent once I started. Scott; Charles Reade; George Eliot; the Brontës; later on, Hardy; Hugo; Dumas, and scores of others. Then came Shakespeare; the Bible; Milton and the line of poets generally. I was hardly sixteen when I picked up James Thomson's *Seasons*, in Stead's "Penny Poets." I came home from work after ten hours in the pit. It was snowing. A great mug of tea warmed me, then I set to work on a "pot pie." Have you ever had a "pot pie"? It is called "steak and kidney" pudding in cafés—but that is only a slight imitation. You put your steak and kidney in a basin, cover it with rolled-out pastry, tie it in a cloth, and boil it in a pan. But you must get it done in Durham or Northumberland, and you must have come from the pit on a snowy day, if you want to understand what that "pot pie" meant to me. When I got started I put *The Seasons* up against the "pot pie" basin—and, believe me, I nearly forgot the pie. Somehow I was finished and lying back on the wooden settle—which was our couch—before I came to myself. I wept for the shepherd who died in the snow. Then I went to spring, and through the rest of the seasons. I'm glad most people don't know that James Thomson of *The Seasons* wrote "Rule Britannia." Still, one can't blame him too much for that. It was the prevailing sentiment.

How I found this literary trail, and how I kept it, I

hardly know. The establishing of the new Miners' Institute helped, for it possessed a good library, and I just went through the catalogue. But there were no persons to act as guides to men who desired to study, no "workers' classes" of any kind, except night-schools for the study of mining. I once tried one of these—and promptly went to sleep.

Sometimes I would read by the firelight when my father was asleep in the bed in the kitchen, for one could not have the gas alight without waking him. I read lots of Shakespeare in this way. In time I got to history—to Macaulay's *History and Essays*, as well as Green's *Short History*. These books came as a revelation. From then to my twenty-first year Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, Prescott's *Conquest of Peru and Mexico*, Motley's *Dutch Republic, The French Revolution*, and heaven knows what. I bought books out of pocket-money, and I bought them when I won money at a "school," for I still gambled, although it was getting stale with the growth of mental appetite. It ended finally, for the two things would not run together. Many a week-end when I've got broken, at the "school" I've spent the time in following the Goths over Europe, right into old Rome, or marching with Attila's "Huns."

I'm glad literature ended my gambling propensities, for it is a fever that burns one up, an irritating thing that makes you want to win; dissatisfied when you do win, almost happy when you lose again; and will not let you be really quiet at any time. A misery-making thing is gambling, promising everything and giving nothing. But I learned much of men and their ways—and I was old before I was young in that respect.

All this reading gave my father great concern. My concentration alarmed him, and he often warned me of the probable results of too much reading. He was really concerned for my mental condition. When I began to buy books I let them lie about until, wanting to safeguard

them and build up a proper library, I began to cast round for a bookcase. Mother solved the problem. She gave me a long orange-box with a partition in the middle. Just the thing. I covered the middle and bottom part with thick brown paper. When father asked me what I was going to do with it, and I told him, he was astounded. "Why, you don't need a great thing like that," he said. We often laughed about it together in later years, for even before I left home to be married I could have filled a score of orange-boxes with my books. I had books but no money—I could not have both, so I spent my money on books.

I became a putter in my eighteenth year. The work was exhausting, but I was strong and I was happy with my books. At that time I had read nothing of economics, and knew little of politics, but I had some very definite opinions on the right and wrong of things social—though I kept them to myself, for they were strange, and I, being only young, might be wrong. My strange ideas are the accepted general ideas of millions of Labour supporters to-day, though I had no idea at the time that many others were thinking as I did and that a great movement embodying these opinions was on the horizon. But I lived in the isolation of a colliery, and was very young, so I did not know.

CHAPTER VIII

The Battle

IT IS ALMOST INCREDIBLE THAT THE MEN AND WOMEN IN their twenties to-day never knew a world in which there were no films, gramophones, wireless, and motor-cars, nor a world in which education for the workers was "suspect" by the upper-classes, and by no means enthusiastically believed in by numbers of the workers themselves; a

world in which schooling finished at twelve, and then "darkest Africa" after that as far as further education was concerned, for you were cut off, lacking opportunity and guidance.

Yet I, who count myself still young, see that youth of mine as though it were a century away. Things incredible to-day were commonplace then. The upper classes had their share of boozing and gambling, though the literature of that day uses nicer terms, for it was not quite so fashionable as it had been. So with us. Men of my age saw drunkenness and real cut-em-to-pieces fighting which would have sickened a "big fight" crowd to-day. These were regular affairs when the pubs were turning out.

But the one I best remember took place out of a gambling school of which I was one. The crowd, the game, and the men were like magnets to me. Fine men there were among them—"characters" who commanded respect, as straight and true as steel, and selfless as a saint when a man was in danger in the deeps below.

On this occasion a man was throwing the pennies. We who were around the thrower put sixpences or shillings in his hand. If the pennies both dropped "tails" up, then he paid us even money. If they were both "heads" up, then all he held was his own. Many "backers" might lose a sixpence or a shilling if the pennies came down "tails," but the man who was throwing—or the "hoyer," as we called him—might lose a pound.

There was a large crowd of us at this school, and the man throwing stood to win or lose a large sum according to our reckoning. Up went the pennies time after time, only to fall an indecisive head and tail, Bob Sharples threw them low and high, whirled them fast and slow, but, with that humour that characterises Lady Luck at times, she refused to decide, and kept those who wooed her on the edge of anticipation, and the longer she kept them waiting, the keener and sharper grew the edge.

The eyes of the scores of men followed the pennies as they rose and fell—silence on the upward flight and shouts as they dropped. But it seemed impossible to get a decision. Excitement had grown so that the persons with the smallest bets on followed the game as though they had a fortune on the result. It was one of those rare occasions when her ladyship will reveal her whims and tantalise men so that they grow hot and cold in turns. The mass of men were wedged together, and bent forward as one, when the pennies reached the ground, pressing forward so that it was difficult to keep the ring properly. So it came to pass that when one came down a "head" and the other rolled slowly, either by accident or design a foot touched it, and the penny went over "head" up. Clamour and conflict of opinion followed. Some were for this penny to be spun up alone; some wanted both thrown up; and others, who had bets on "heads," demanded their money. The crowd was ugly and angry, and there was all the promise of a free fight, when a quiet-looking man pushed his way into the ring and held up a hand. The silence that followed was a testimony to his personality. There was no argument. He simply said, "It was a head," and the judgment was apparently accepted, if the silence that followed could be taken as any indication. It was not strange that this arbitrator's decision should be final, for the crowd knew him, and in gambling, as in other affairs, clean cut, "straight" men are valued. This was especially so with Jimmy Bowe, for his decision was given to his own loss. But there was one in the crowd who refused to accept his ruling. Just as quietly as Jimmy Bowe had spoken, Nat Tewins faced Bob and ordered him to throw the pennies again. There was in his voice a menace and an assurance that his order would be obeyed, but the sudden set of Bob's jaw, and the meeting of eyes with eyes, left no doubt that he challenged the order.

As the two men faced each other, all eyes were riveted on them, the original trouble seemingly forgotten in the new turn of events, for that crowd knew that it was no

light than that two men like these should be standing tense, challenging. If the colliery had been taken man by man, these two would have been chosen above all others for strength and courage.

None had thought of it before, but the event of the two drawn together emphasised the fact.

Standing six feet and splendidly proportioned, Nat Towns looked a giant beside Sharples. Bending down, he warned him to toss the pennies again or he "would smash his - - - pudding face."

Now Bob was no fighter, but such words could have only one effect. It was certainly a surprised, furious Nat who rose from the ground after Bob had struck, and, before those on the outer edge of the crowd knew what was happening two passion-driven men were pounding and plugging each other. Inside the ring, men tried to get back, for the fighters were tangled up with them and they were compelled to separate the two, but that was obviously only temporary, for nothing could stop this couple. The fight was on, and it only remained to conduct the matter properly.

The arbitrator who had tried to keep the peace was, by common consent, named referee. It would hardly be accurate to say he was named; rather it was tacitly understood. Refereeing fights was not in his line, but he knew as much about it as anyone there, and he possessed the chief qualification—he could be trusted to see fair play.

A rough and ready ring was formed on the grass. Its size was dictated by the referee and the capacity of those he appointed to hold the human barriers in check, for the spectators were jammed in a warm straining mass. Points of vantage had been taken by individuals and groups on a large refuse-heap close by. From there one could see pasture fields and ploughed lands stretching away to a distant town, with the great pit-head and pulley-wheels standing near by, but none noticed these things, for all eyes were riveted on the two men. Both were now

stripped to the waist. The difference between them was extreme; it was the difference between the bulldog and the tiger. In height and reach Nat Tewins had a tremendous advantage. It seemed impossible that the short, rock-like figure of his opponent could stand long before that splendid mass of manhood. Powerful as Bob was, he seemed dwarfed beside such an opponent.

When the referee gave the word, it was immediately apparent that neither man was skilled at the game. There was little preliminary sparring or feeling for openings. Sure of himself, the bigger man rushed his opponent, who did not attempt to side-step; if anything, he moved forward to meet the rush, but the long arms and great bunched, granite-like fists reached Bob before he could get near his opponent. There was a dull sound as Tewins caught him in the ribs, but that did not stay him from getting to close quarters and pounding the body of Tewins until they were parted by the referee for holding.

Thus, many rounds were fought without the least pretence of science: simply rushing bodies, swinging, slogging blows. By all the tests of reach, height and weight, Bob would be crushed. Men wondered how long he could stand the punishment he was already receiving, never doubting the end was only limited by his powers of endurance.

By this time the crowd had grown considerably, for the cries and shouts had drawn others who had been passing along the road a little way beyond, or standing idly at the upper end of the colliery. Among the new arrivals there were those who were alien to the general temper and taste of the crowd, and expressed themselves openly against what was taking place. They would have brought the police to stop the fight; but this was private ground, and the owner had protected gamblers in the past against attempts to prosecute. Indeed, a policeman stood on the road some distance away, knowing well what was

happening ; but he was powerless to interfere. But even those who had the taste for this kind of thing were growing apprehensive of its results. It was clear that as long as Bob was conscious, and could rise, he would fight. His courage not only moved the crowd to admiration, but almost to anger for the stubbornness of the man in face of the hopelessness of his task. True, he had punished Tewins a little, but those long, powerful arms and terrible knuckles crashed and smashed body and face continually, and sometimes both fists together beat him to the ground. There he would remain for a second or two, but always he managed to regain his feet, swaying and staggering away until he could get time to pull himself together, and just as often he rallied, to return, apparently strong, and ready to give as much as possible, as well as to take what came. But his opponent, towering over him, sweeping him off his feet, beating him to his knees, battering his face to a pulp and punishing his body to breaking-point, sensed a danger to himself which was not obvious to the crowd. That was Bob's inexhaustible vitality. The advantage and apparent supremacy had one hidden difference—that of the lesser man's fitness. He was no saint, but he had a great pride in his body, and fitness was his creed. He was very conscious and quietly proud of his physical powers, and, though he had companied with the roughest roystering gambling crowd in the colliery, he neither drank nor smoked. He was not given to serious thought, but he was master of his senses and strong of will. His work developed, drilled and disciplined his body, and mastery in the mine demanded mastery of the will. The logic of the pit demands this in any case, but with Bob it had become a habit not confined to the pit. The will-power quarried in sweat and toil below ground was dominant in his life on the surface, and even in his moments of complete supremacy his opponent by instinct sensed and feared this. One-sided though the battle seemed, he himself was growing weary. With the increasing consciousness of this, he called up all his resources to batter Bob into submission. In his

ignorance of the science of the game he was incapable of delivering the knock-out blow, but he thought to accomplish the same object by sheer brutal punishment. His fear drove him now into a fighting frenzy that sent Bob down repeatedly. He rose again, only to be immediately felled.

It was at this moment that the crowd began to fear for the life of the lesser man, and spontaneously it broke the ring, demanding that the fight should finish. His face swollen, scarcely able to see, and with blood-bespattered body, Bob laughed. They tried to persuade him to give it up, wanted to dress him, tried to do it forcibly, but he threatened them, and both men were of the same mind. Cursing, threatening, appealing, his friends finally realised it was hopeless. And again the two men faced each other. But it was not long before that which Tewins feared began to materialise. The long arms were losing their power, and vitality was telling. Repeatedly Bob broke the effect of the reach, and the knowledge of his opponent's weariness was new life to him. The tired, sagging body of the big man acted like a tonic. Sharples rushed and punished body and face so often that it gradually dawned upon the crowd that his staying-power was now a make-weight, neutralising the advantages of the other man. These were still a factor in the fight, but at last they failed to completely keep at bay the shorter man, who was paying back with interest what he had received. The only thing Tewins could do now was defend; gone was the old assurance and ceaseless attack, and with the passing of it his weakness was evident. Ignorant of the very rudiments of the art, he could not defend, and the shorter, strong arms of the other man were deadly in their effect. Not only was Tewins a child in defence, but he bore his punishment hardly and he bled freely. .

The crowd was now very quiet. There was no word from the fighters, and, but for the occasional resounding thud when bare knuckles reached the body, the field might well have been empty. Apart from the silent,

common human background, it might have been two desperate animals fighting in some remote place of Nature. The two bruised half-naked bodies were so weary that when they held they did not easily part now. The tide of battle had turned for Bob, but he also had neither art nor strength enough to finish the job. Repeatedly he called up all his physical resources and battered his opponent at will, but he could not bring it to an end, and, as a result of his extreme efforts, he, too, was now used up. For long spaces the pair seemed to lean against each other out of sheer exhaustion. In the face of the apparent hopelessness of a decision, the referee and friends of both men tried to persuade them once more to give it up, but it was hopeless. With swollen, bloody faces, they faced each other, sustained only by their will-power. They fell, and rose slowly, sometimes resting on a knee as though there was a tacit momentary truce between them, but always they gained their feet to continue. The spectators had been swept off their feet by the clash of these two men an hour ago, but they were now in the grip of another emotion. The passion had given way to pity, and the tremor that is near to tears was seen on many faces; but the decision was nearer than they guessed, and it lay with them.

The drooping, almost helpless condition of Tewins left his face exposed, and Bob rallied sufficient strength to swing a hard right to it. The giant went down, but the effect took the other off his feet too. They rested there for some time, then came slowly to their feet, neither able to take advantage of the other as they rose.

Once more they staggered forward, just able to raise their arms. But that wind of the will of a crowd which bloweth where it listeth swept it into the ring as one man. It was a remarkable manifestation of crowd emotion. Those immediately near the fighters, and those in more elevated positions, broke spontaneously, and the two men found themselves separated, wedged in with others, just sufficiently conscious to know the battle was finished.

Thus it was that after I left school I yet went to a "school," and, though it was not an educational establishment, I yet learned much of men and their ways. Though I wouldn't for worlds mention the proper names of the men concerned in this fight, there are those who will recall it—that is, if they don't mix it with many others we saw.

And what with Gibbon and Dickens, Nat Tewins and Bob Sharples, I kept company with a mixed lot, and had a wide range of very dissimilar friends.

CHAPTER IX

The Putter

AND NOW I WAS A PUTTER, THE KEY-MAN IN THE MINE—next to the coal-hewer, as far as the big collieries are concerned. Those in authority wanted me to travel other roads, but I would putt in spite of authority. The miner, like many other workmen, will sometimes speak with an air of detachment concerning his work; he will even say rude things about it at times. But wait a little, and the pride of his calling will out. To become a putter in a colliery like Boldon was to rank as a man. Not everyone desired to become a putter; some returned after a test. Why does anyone really want to follow this risky, exhausting, body-testing calling? Every putter will tell you it is because they are "daft," but there is a secret sense of swank in their "daftness." But, then, why do young men take so eagerly to flying in aeroplanes? When one considers the risks, it looks "daft," but the young men line up and jostle each other to get there. Hard fact; one must live, and grim things are done to live. Still, I wonder what there was in that "putting" business which gripped me? Ten hours a day—with your head between your knees, cooped up on the limbers between pony and

... only lit by a glimmer of light,
... and broken so that your
... top and sides. Thick flannel
... your noddle, and sleeveless thin shirt for
... and sometimes nothing at all. Your shoulder
... the pony's rump, hand gripping the tub-handle,
... swirling along the narrow track, now guiding the tub
... round a turn—going the pace all the time. Sweating,
... sweating, rushing—pony, man and tub part of one whole.
Concentrate absolutely, putter; for many depend for
their living on you! Reach the man, swing your tub into
the posture rough and ready "siding," out with the
full one, in with the empty, on to the limbers, and travel
as if life and death depended upon you! Hour after hour
this goes on—unless you get "off the way." It is when
you get "off the way" the work really begins. To lift
the tub is bad enough, but if one side is against the timber,
or the roof is so low that your wheel is still an inch or so
below the rail when your tub is lifted—then what? You
twist, wrestle, scheme, and then drop it to think again.
Suppose you get the "fore" end on the "way"—or rail—
and there isn't room enough for a mouse to get past the
tub to get to the "hind end," or hinder part of the tub.
How then? Frankly, it baffles me even now how we did
it. A putter is an eel, a lifting-crane, and a racehorse all
in one. It is wise to keep your head if you can, but if you
are soaked in sweat, used up, without an idea left for
"scheming" the tub on, getting not a penny for all that
trouble, and the hewers waiting on you—how can you
keep your head? I've seen men cry with passion, address
the tub as though it were a human being in unrepeatable
language, and sometimes throw things at it. I won't tell
you what I did—but I hope my old "putting" mates
don't give me away. Still, there are worse things than
getting "off the way." There is being under the tub, for
instance. Once I had a couple of months under the
doctor, when Jack Goodwin, of "homer" pigeon fame—
known all over Britain among men of the "fancy"—

found me pinned under fourteen hundredweight of coal and a tub of six hundredweight. A narrow squeak, that was, as Jack reminded me only a short time ago. As he said, I was like a rat in a trap, and it is not too much to say that but for his real cool, masterly handling of the situation I should not have been writing this. Though I have not said much on this accident question, it is not because there is nothing to say. Every miner gets his turn many times over in his time—and he only thanks his stars he is not included in the Official Gazette statistics of fatal accidents which work out year after year at round about four killed every working day in the average year. Most miners have had experiences which make one feel that it is only by a "miracle" they are alive. So if you have the marks of accidents upon you as I have, like other miners, they are compensated for by the rest you get while under the doctor—and at any rate you are still alive.

When I was being passed for the Army the doctor was struck at the blue marks all over my body.

"What are those?" he asked. "Have you been shot?"

"No, that's a disease," was my reply.

He called another doctor to look at me. He was equally astonished. "What's that?"

"A disease," I said.

"What disease?"

"Miningitis. That's a disease, isn't it?" was my reply. And they both laughed.

And as putter and hewer I carry the marks of my high calling about with me. Now sometimes there would only be yourself "putting" at that particular "flat," or small district of the mine, and sometimes two or three others, just according to the number of coal-hewers at the face. When there are two or three of you, it is wise to "co-operate" and pool your earnings—or "hing up," as we say in the north. When you did not "hing up" and "kept your own," a flat became a bedlam. You put in lots, or

' roads - the nearest or farthest-off places to which you had to travel. Then the run began. It was a race for life on the day every day. You were as good as that other fellow any day in the week, and, anyhow, you didn't like his face. If you met on the single track or got a 'vokini' which of you was to back his pony and give way to the others. That was a nice point for this underground League of Nations. But, there being no League at that time, war was sometimes declared. And now and then I've known vitriolic words followed by action. Not that I was ever personally involved in this way, mind you, for I believed in the League of Nations methods even at that time. But on the whole it was so troublesome and impossible to work under these conditions that as a rule we had to pool our wages and work together.

One of the most inspiring memories of this period was of my first quarter as a putter. I was "cavilled" with George Debbet. Strong, fleet, untirable, he had the countenance of a lion and yet was the most modest of men. That first morning I began to hang my "tokens" up on a separate nail as usual. I said: "keep my own and look after myself." My mate George nearly scratched my shin with his swearing. Who the ---- so and so ---- did I think I was? Now the first day's "putting" is bad enough, but when a fellow like this rages at you to start with, your wits are scattered. So it was a few minutes before I realised that this man was telling me to put my tokens on his nail; that we were mates, and would "hang up." In another place I've told the story in full, but I may be permitted to repeat that this unlettered swearing man was the most perfect gentleman I have ever known.

On the whole these big colliery putters are an independent and a troublesome lot—as the union secretary as well as the management will tell you. I don't wonder, for I was a putter for five years, and I was no less troublesome than others. Sometimes there were "real grievances, and sometimes grievances that were not." We really didn't

know what it was, but the strain told at times. And when it did, there was trouble. Such work should be well paid, and it wasn't. At least, I never got anything out of it to shout about. I was strong, eager, and keen for money. Ask the "old hands" at Bell Busby. I did not bunk or make, nor did I worry about doing so. I only wanted to look. I got them cheap, but that was all I had for my share of the attack. Often we were in trouble about prices of the coal, and more than once in court for stopping the pit. There we would insist on the magistrates taking each case on its merits, conducting our own case, asking the clerk to read the charges over again in plain English, questioning the magistrate and generally making ourselves a nuisance. When nearly a hundred putters were charged, it meant a week's work for the magistrates to get through the cases. They would adjourn to consider the situation and then call the court to us, whereupon we would chorus the last thing we call upon the world to "praise ye the Lord, 'tis good to raise." And we certainly did raise our voices. The strictly disciplined, order-keeping officials of the court were non-plussed by such conduct. They had been given no rules for a situation such as this, and if they had there was no means of enforcing them. We could have been jailed for contempt, of course, but that would have left the pit idle indefinitely. The magistrates would take us all in the end—but how to get us to pay was a matter for the manager.

At such times the putters would hold a meeting of their own in the Miners' Hall. No one but a putter was allowed in. We had our chairman, and our meeting was fairly business-like, as we ranged from eighteen to thirty years of age. I remember on one of these occasions how a coal-hewer insisted on coming in to the meeting. Someone interfered. The hewer was a local boxer, and he struck. Then the band played. For when a man strikes in a colliery, he does not merely hit a person, he hits a family. So, the battle being joined, we were knocked over forms and had to extricate ourselves from under them. It was

a mix-up affair, and when the dust cleared there were four separate fights going on in the street outside the Miners' Hall. We went to work next morning without a meeting.

It was under these circumstances that I first began to act in a representative capacity, for I soon became the putters' spokesman. But to reason with such a hardy, independent lot was no easy business. When you spoke for them to the full union meeting or mine officials, you were never quite sure that you would carry them all with you. And then I was only a youngster among seasoned veterans. My first visit to the Coal Trade Hall, Newcastle, to meet some of the chief men in the trade, with the officials of our company and union officials, took place when I was nineteen years of age. Harry Metcalfe (who was killed in the war as an officer in the Canadians) and myself were selected by the putters to represent them. We carried all the don't-care-for-anybody spirit of our class into that meeting of experienced men. We had neither experience nor wisdom, but we knew it all and said so. But it was galling to find that youth did not end with us, and that in more serious and responsible days I've had to take back with interest, from the young and independent, all we gave our elders that day. We did, however, come to an arrangement with the owners.

We returned feeling like conquering heroes, and in that spirit began our report. But it was soon clear that we were not being received as heroes. A man rose and asked, "What the — does a whipper-snapper like you know about it?" He was howled down, but persisted in interrupting. He rose again and was pulled down. Again, and he was knocked down. When the row was over, our report was accepted—and I was the richer for the knowledge of two great truths: "The man who thinks he can satisfy everyone is a fool"; and in public affairs "it is best to walk softly even when you feel sure."

All this was about 1900, before the Labour Party came into being, and when the I.L.P. was little more than a rumour among us. Of politics I knew nothing and cared

less. But there was growing up in me at that time something which springs from the very roots of my being and waxes stronger as the years come and go, something which is not in political or economic programmes, for it goes so deep down to the soul of a man that it seems a dream, a thing of the imagination, hard to apprehend, difficult to hold, and impossible to interpret. But when it is possible to interpret this thing men and women leap to it, for they too have dreamed, and kept it to themselves lest they be laughed at for their foolishness in the world of cold, hard fact.

For I had actually arrived at the conclusion that if there was any good life, and freedom from insecurity, and beauty, and knowledge, or leisure, then the men who did the world's dirty, sweaty, toilsome, risky work, and the women who shared the life with them, ought to be the first entitled to these things. And when I looked round I found they were the last to have them. Nay, the farther you got away from these things, the more likely you were to have beauty, leisure, and knowledge.

* I held that no man needs knowledge more than he who is subject to those who have knowledge—and because they have knowledge. That if there is one man in the world who needs knowledge, it is he who does the world's most needful work and gets least return because he lacks knowledge. And I also held that a man might be proud of his dirty work, all the more proud because it was dirty, so that instead of esteeming the man who has a "good job" we should most esteem the man who did good work. And who does better work than a miner? Yet his poor return is the world's measure of this man, though it knows his work is beyond measure.

I held, too, that a man need not be any the poorer workman for an education. So I sought to excel in my work and in knowledge, determined to prove my faith by holding to both throughout life. If I have left the pit, it is not because I sought to, as I shall show, but because events, and my own mates, mastered me. But I am still

in the midst of my old life, dreaming my dreams, seeing its very slow unfolding, and with a purpose that strengthens as time moves on. As I write I hear my neighbour return from his day's work in the mine. Quiet, strong, a good workman, a good father, a good husband. From home to pit, from pit to home. His luxury is his home. He loves and is loved—though he would laugh at the word. A brave, good man who is not aware of it. But he receives a meagre monetary reward for his labour because he does the most disagreeable, dangerous, trying work in the world. One thing I like about the Russian Revolution. Not its striving to fit its national life to a rigid economic creed. That arouses no response in me—though they call it a Socialist creed I deny that it is. Not the Communist dream of reverberating crashes which means bloody misery to the workers they say they wish to free. Not for these things do I esteem these revolutionaries, but for the fact that they have strenuously sought to give first consideration and first place to the man who does the real work, the dirty, disagreeable, dangerous work, to the man whose hands are calloused and whose body is bruised and marked with his labours. They have not succeeded in realising their ideals. There is much that is almost pitiful in that land. But they have endeavoured to give the man who does the brute work first place, and in doing that they challenge the accepted canons of all modern nations. And deep in his heart the Russian worker knows it. That is why the present dictatorship is possible, and why it will continue for a time. That time may be long, or it may be short, but one thing will live for ever—the discovery that the humble manual worker is first, the very soul of the body national. There will be no retreat from that action ; its working out in the life of Russia must end dictatorship in time. New vitality has come to that nation from the enthroning of the man with calloused hands. Rigid theories with which this discovery has little in common have already been modified by it, and they will ultimately yield to it. Europe and the world outside will also be

not limited by this fact of the worker who has become the first citizen and whom the intellectual craftsmen serve. Not economic theory, but the enthroning of the calloused hands, is the most challenging fact in the world's life to-day. Its eternal truth will cleave society from pole to pole. For the seed of it lies in the heart of him who does the body-testing work in every land.

CHAPTER X

Little Bethel

INSTANTLY, SUBTLY, ALMOST UNCONSCIOUSLY I HAD BEEN building a barrier between myself and my old gambling habits and rough and ready life—an intellectual and moral barrier. I know intellectuals have gone the pace without finding such habits incompatible with mental pursuits. Their stones crowd the pages of our history—and many are pitiful. But moral and mental growth combined with the relentless daily discipline of the mine is another matter. So it is no wonder that I withdrew into myself until the old life was gone. Few knew I was a book-lover, or the new strange thoughts that were possessing me. For in those days if you were a serious student you studied mining—of which I got plenty without studies. The raising of the school age and the coming of working-class education since that time has bridged a great gulf which then lay between the manual worker and culture. True, forces were at work even then, but they had not accomplished much, and had certainly not touched the life of colliery communities. So I was simply voted "queer" by the people.

Apart from the meagre elementary education, one great force held the field in the matter of personal development—and that was the chapel. And looking back now,

I see that it was inevitable that I should ultimately seek the company of the serious minded people who gravitated together and formed the "Society." This, of course, has no reference to the "Society" column, but as anyone in a colliery knows, it is the Methodist Society.

Men always speak of their mental and moral processes with hesitation and reluctance. It is always easy to get a conversation about the weather, and men talk to each other loudly across the street about horse-racing, football, or the latest fight. But of deeper matters they speak in undertone unless the whole company is like-minded. It is not easy even to write of these things, but if one would give a faithful picture of his time, and of the mental outlook produced by various social factors, it is necessary to run the risk of being charged with undue egotism. But as to that, sooner or later all of us are conscious of the truth of the saying which was ever on the lips of the kindly old Irish-woman who was our neighbour, "We are all as God made us." It is not only natural to speak with hesitation of our inner processes, but we are also blamably prone to be silent about many influences to which we owe much. And in this intellectually superior age men are often silent on the influence of religion upon them, especially when that religion has come by way of the chapel. For are there not intellectuals who curl the lip and say, "Oh, the Little Bethel!" That is supposed to be the last word on the subject. Have not a host of the clever literary and philosophic writers exposed the "Little Bethel" for what it was? True; and there were tendencies to narrowness and hypocrisy which sometimes needed rough handling. So do all institutions need it at times. But that does not make it any the less a fact that the most powerful forces for the mental and moral elevation of the workers during the industrial era has been this contemptuously called "Little Bethel." The so-called intellectuals speak of these as "reactionary." In truth, the gentlemen who speak so know as much about the real living history of the people of this island as pigs know of aeroplanes. Mr.

Buckle, and a long line of his kind, have rendered great service in insisting on proper respect for the intellect and its wonderful achievements, but when they try to put it in a separate box, in case it is corrupted or cramped by the moral and religious senses, they prove too much, which is no proof at all. Fortunately there are historians and philosophers who know, and are not afraid to show, that if Britain holds a comparatively advanced position in her social movements to-day it is largely because the eighteenth-century Methodist Revival saturated the industrial masses with a passion for a better life, personal, moral, mental and social.

The Methodist Revival of the eighteenth century came to mining communities in the time of economic, social, and moral chaos. The people were mazed and dazed by the greatest economic cataclysm in human history. The miners were almost its first and chief victims. Conditions baffle description. Poet, preacher, and historian, men and women in all walks of the nation's life at that period, have tried to tell what they saw, and are clearly conscious that their description is inadequate. But the sum total of their witness gives a picture of unbelievable social degradation and hopelessness. Through these communities the mighty Revival suddenly swept, catching them in the swirl of its emotionalism, arousing new desires, enlarging the individual, searching out and steeling the will. The chapel was their first social centre. Here it was they drew together, found strength in their weakness, and expressed to each other their hidden thoughts and needs. The chapel gave them their first music, their first literature and philosophy to meet the harsh life and cruel impact of the crude materialistic age. Here men first found the language and art to express their antagonism to grim conditions and injustice.

Their hymns and sermons may have been of another world, but the first fighters and speakers for unions, Co-op. Societies, political freedom, and improved conditions, were Methodist preachers. That is beyond argument. And the

Gospel expressed in social terms has been more of a driving-power in northern mining circles than all the economic teaching put together. Room for criticism there may be, but that the eighteenth century Revival has been a motive power in the personal, domestic, and social life in the Kingdom of Collieries is beyond doubt. And here and now I wish to pay my tribute to that movement, and to the humble people who composed the Society of Methodists which I joined in my youth, and of which I remain a loyal member to this day. It was composed of men and women who in many cases had received no education worth speaking of, but who had become really cultured, though their reading was limited to certain schools of thought.

One there was who would sing you a "spiritual" or equally a comic song in fine style, or he would preach a sermon. Others would lead a choir, play the organ or piano, or preach a sermon. One, who had only been taught by his wife to read when he was in his thirties, used to wait for me when I was putting and he was hewing at the same flat. As we went "out bye," my pony trotting before, we would talk books while we walked, bent double in the dark roadway. I remember well when this elderly man first struck Nietzsche. That was a "find"—and I also remember how the man turned me upside down mentally. Which was all to my good.

This man read the New Testament in Greek, and oratorios were as easy to him as the latest song is to the man in the street. Many of the members of course were illiterate, but they were fine types of men and women, and had individuality—and that is not a common thing. All, even the most ordinary—or, if you like, ignorant as far as education goes—all of them were "something." Methodism took the "nobodies," and made the most humble and hopeless "somebody." They set aside the things that are not good for a man; they had some little pride in their dress; they made their homes to be things of beauty, and aspired and worked to give their children a better life and oppor-

tunity than themselves. They are as a whole among the best men and women I have ever known, and I would sooner hunt tigers with them than with the superior person who lifts his eyebrows with astonishment when you frankly own your allegiance. A little of that gentleman goes a long way in my experience.

So here among the Methodists my growing tendencies were encouraged, stimulated, and given opportunity for development. There was about them a warmth and beautiful humble helpfulness which was very moving. There was a spirit of *camaraderie* among the young people I have never seen equalled. Every house was an "open" house. There were spontaneous suppers, when a lot of us drifted in by chance. We were not "invited"; we invited ourselves. We talked pit-work, ideals, the Bible, literature, or union business. The piano rattled, the choir was in action, and we sang with more abandon than any gang who has just learned to murder the latest film song. And most of these people could sing, for they had been trained in choirs from childhood. They were a merry lot. The man who could forget that experience, or be silent about it, would be a traitor to himself. I was encouraged to express myself; to preach and to speak. I was given their warm, helpful friendship, and the hospitality of their homes. No longer was I "queer" or "alone." My thoughts and dreams were given direction. Even when they did not understand or agree they encouraged, and ignorant and intelligent alike combined to set my feet firmly on the road I had haphazardly been looking for. And my experience is a common one in this respect. From this Society there went men and women to all parts of this country—and, indeed, of the world. Miners, and the sons of miners, became school-teachers, Headmasters, University professors, managers, ministers, musicians, social workers, and public men and women. From this Society there grew up men whose fine lives give strength to the working-class communities in which they live, and whose influence upon others as well as their own families has been even greater

than that of the schoolmaster. Everyone knows that such Societies can be multiplied by the thousand, but because they pursue their work quietly, regularly, and are always with us, we do not notice them, and miss their significance. Many new diversions challenge them to-day, and some part of their work is being done by other organisations, but they are still very much alive, for there are profound depths in us that no amount of education can satisfy.

One would think it was no easy thing to walk the "strait and narrow road" in the low, dark, narrow roadways, almost naked, sweating, wrestling, rushing from morning to evening day after day. But the new life deepened conviction of the workers' value, and added zeal to conviction. Like Mark Tapley, we found that the greater the difficulty the greater the chance to "come out strong." Mark must have been a student of Marcus Aurelius, for that moralist teaches in divers ways the same philosophy which Mark preached. All was grist that came to my mental mill, from the Stoics to Thomas à Kempis. The testing work hardened and developed me physically by day, and at night the mental and moral fibre was reinforced from those who had lived in varying ages under different conditions and had left on record the sum of their experiences. So did I test the great teachers until the wheat in their words became part of me. But all the time I was a putter, now an old hand, one of the experienced, speaking with authority in any "flat" or in any meeting; one whose workmanship could not be challenged. I say that freely and proudly among the men who knew me in those days. Good workmanship anywhere, at any job, and in any walk of life, gives great satisfaction, is a thing for just pride, and makes the case of the worker all the stronger. And it is my experience that the best workman makes the best union man, the best Socialist, and the most loyal comrade. Fight, and never let up in the fight for high wages and high standards. A man who whines above or below is no good to any

movement anywhere at any time. It is the man who gives of his best at his job who gives of his best in any movement. A good worker neither whines nor wilts before the capitalist. He looks him straight in the face, for he is conscious of his worth; and he knows he is no less a man of worth, and perhaps better than he whom he faces.

Now I will not claim that I was always a model of patience and good temper, in spite of my philosophy. A putter is a putter--and they are "lads." If there must be a House of Lords, why not select them from the "big putters" in the Durham collieries? They would certainly supply virility and initiative--and lend a lot of colour to the Gilded Chamber. It would be interesting for instance, to hear them debating the "spread-over" or at any rate telling the mover of the amendment what they thought of his grandmother.

I once had as a hewer a veritable "Oliver Twist," for he was always wanting more. He never got his proper "shift," or turn. He always wanted a length of plates or rails. He never had enough timber, or "splits," which are the ends of props, cut off and split. He talked to the coal or grumbled at it. He grumbled at the timber in the face; he went as near grumbling at the putter as a hewer dare. When I went in, he would request in the tone of an order:

"Hoy a split in, lad." I would throw in the "split." Then it was:

"Gie me a prop, lad." I would give him a prop. My theory was that patience and kindness would finally conquer even this cantankerous specimen of humanity. But there are exceptions, and this was one. It was a very heavy "ledding," or push up, to the face, but never a move to help, as is the custom of hewers under such circumstances. And one day, wearied by repeated orders, I got the full tub out and made a clear road to give him his "splits." I gathered a heap of them and crashed them in with all the force I could command, one after

the other nearly a dozen. He found security in the nook of his place, yelling that I was trying to kill him. When the coconut-shy game was over, he wanted to know what the -- I was trying to do. In bland, patient tones I said I was just giving him a few "splits." And that ended the story. He asked for no more "splits." All of which gave point to the moral that it is a good thing for good men that now and then an evil man is destroyed.

CHAPTER XI

Conversion

IN 1904 A BRANCH OF THE I.L.P. WAS ESTABLISHED IN OUR colliery. I had for some time been a regular reader of the *Labour Leader* and the *Clarion*, and had become a regular speaker in the union meetings, and was also known as a preacher and as being something of a student. So when I joined the I.L.P. I was immediately invited to become a speaker on the I.L.P. plan. Conscious of my own mental needs, I demurred. There was time yet, for my equipment was weak in this direction and I wanted to be sure of myself. I was laughed at, but that made no difference. The *Labour Leader* had linked me to the great industrial world, and it and the *Clarion* had shown me I had long been a Socialist without knowing it. It was about this time that I discovered a certain bookseller's in Newcastle. That enterprising firm freely displayed books and pamphlets on their stall in the market which other book stalls had never heard of, or, if they had, they did not show them. For to show such books was at this time almost blasphemy, and likely to ruin a bookseller's business. But these booksellers were Socialists, and ran the risk in the interests of propaganda. The

result was that they gained instead of losing customers, and their business grew, so that to-day they are one of the great booksellers in Newcastle. To them I would go on pay Saturdays—for we were paid once a fortnight—to buy books and pamphlets, and there I met kindred souls from other parts of Northumberland and Durham, eyeing the latest exaltation of Socialist literature.

Thus did a definite challenge of the accepted order of things come to me, and my thoughts of many years in relation to the world of industry find concrete form. For politics proper I cared little, although our colliery had always been "agin the Government." Years before we had backed Cunningham Graham and Dillon Lewis when they fought both Liberal and Tory, and, though we were nominally Liberals, we were very familiar with the idea of "fighting them both."

So I joined the I.L.P., read economics, and added the social writings of Carlyle and Ruskin as a make-weight.

. In this year also I went to the coal-face as a hewer, and in the first few months was elected unanimously as the hewers' assistant—check-weighman. At that time I was about twenty-three years of age. So at this age responsibility came to me as a member of the Miners' Lodge Committee and their representative; I was now a "man." For a man is not really a man in Durham until he goes to the coal-face. I had worked in every shift, at every hour, night and day, and every class of work from the shaft to the face. And here I was at last, after eleven years in the pit, with my own picks, my own "marrows," and my own ideas of society. My apprenticeship had been served in hard labour, but it was worth the while. Hardly anything had been allowed to deflect me from my course. The one thing I wanted to be was a hewer—and an educated man. I drove myself like a self-imposed taskmaster to that end; I did not want another job. But a fire within had for years burned in

me in revolt against the low estimate placed upon the hardly driven manual worker, and the meagre return he got for his labour. Sometimes I would meet men better placed in life, better educated, and I discovered that education and status by no means always meant intelligence. For by comparisons these men were often below numbers of men whom I knew who had never had any education. I discovered that a man may be educated and yet not intelligent, and that the old teacher who instructed us to get knowledge, but with all our getting to get understanding, knew what he was talking about. I pored over this undervaluing of the hard-driven manual worker which the worker himself accepted. And, although a Socialist, I knew that any change which did not have the result of giving greater esteem to the manual worker, and of altering the relations between him and the collar-and-tie man, whatever his status—that this would be no change at all. But I also believed that knowledge would make the real change. And, as I have said before, time has confirmed that view. It was my definite purpose, to remain a hewer and preach this gospel, and drive it into the minds of my fellow-workmen. I may as well say here that though the position of the manual worker has been improved—he would be a fool who would deny it—yet the disproportion between the manual worker in the basic trades, upon which we depend for our life, and the professional classes, and many other workers, is no better to-day than it was. I believe it is actually worse. Whether we are Members of Parliament or clerks, business or professional men, we assume for ourselves a standard of need and comfort which we do not in our minds accord to the man who gives us all the things we think we need—the manual worker in basic trades. It is true the worker also accords us these things and accepts his lot. But there are moments when a stray gleam of truth makes him doubt. If ever he continues through youth and manhood to gather knowledge, he will repudiate the accepted standards. No Socialism is Socialism which does not

deliberately rearrange standards and repudiate those present values which are tacitly accepted everywhere.

Under this conviction I shaped and sharpened every power I possessed, for I wanted nothing so much as the breaking of the serf status to which the manual worker is condemned. In time I came to vary my union work, and my preaching and reading, with organising adolescent classes. I ran them for a year or two in my mother's house, and, after marriage, in my own home. We had great times, and I was much encouraged. A group of us including some school-teachers, started an adult school, with lectures and a gymnasium. There was also a very good art class. This went on for years in a building made by knocking two colliery houses into one. The adult school still goes on, though not in the same building. This, it must be repeated, was long before the Workers' Educational Classes, or any such organisations had been heard of. One would have thought that the improved educational system and higher school age would have multiplied the numbers of these classes, but they have not. What is the reason? There is something wrong with education when the years of school education are increased and there is less desire for knowledge in the adolescent years. I know many good aspects of education, and I see them in my present work. Sometimes new and heartening signs appear surprisingly. I know our teachers do good work, and I am glad when they get a year longer for study that they may improve their work upon the mind of the child.

But why do youths not show greater desire to gain knowledge in those fateful years between leaving school and manhood? And why do men not rally to classes for their personal improvement? I know Workers' Educational Classes are increasing, and evening classes are attended. But is the result in proportion to the extended opportunities, and the time, work, and money now spent on schools? Emphatically no; the willingness of the adolescent to stop where he left off at school is a disturbing

factor, for modern conditions demand more and more educated citizens. A just order of society implies an educated manual class as well as educated professional men and women.

True, there is greater personal pride in dress, and temperance is increasing rapidly—more rapidly than most people think. The pubs are still patronised, but the proportion of young people who frequent these places is growing less. The film, wireless, and transport are revolutionising social habits. Standards of conduct are definitely improved. But there is little, if any, increased desire for education after school years. In such a society as ours, understanding, ability to reason, and clear vision are needed by the average man and woman. These can only be attained by continuous gathering of knowledge into and throughout the adult life. And for the manual worker knowledge is the key to social justice.

CHAPTER XII

Release

IT WAS PAY SATURDAY. I WAS FREE TO GO WHERE I LIKED and do what I liked all the day. A whole day with the blue sky and fleecy clouds above. Free! Free! If you have risen at four or five on a summer morning and later walked up the village street on your way to the pit, you would understand what that meant. The morning air is exhilarating, the flowers in the little gardens so fragrant, the twittering of the sparrows sweet music—why, the very long commonplace colliery streets seem almost beautiful. And you are going to the pit. That is more than going down into deeps of darkness; it means more than toil and sweat; you are about to become part of a vast mechanism which sets the pace and subordinates the

will until you are part of it. Never does the scent of the flowers possess you, never does the sky seem so beautiful and the birds so much to be envied, as on such a morning. A miner has his compensations. He sees the gloom and he knows grim toil, but he sees the rich, rare morning and he drinks it in. And he knows the glorious gift of a whole day to himself when he gets it. For he has earned that day.

Early rising was a habit dictated by my work. On this summer morning I rose early, and before eight o'clock was out in the fields far away from the colliery. From the thick green grass, mixed with the pure and yellow of clover and buttercups, larks rose and went circling upward until they were like a tiny dot against the sky, singing with that unmatched musical trill and fullness which is only heard in the early morn of summer. Yellow striped bees droned and dipped greedily into the hearts of the clover, and occasionally there was the pleasant munching, tearing sound of feeding cattle.

Arrived at a stile, I sat down to rest. The air was rare and fragrant with the scent of new-mown hay from some unseen field. Long I sat there, breathing deep, noting the weasel which scurried along the hedge, and the hare which went loping into the long grass. The swing from the strain, darkness, dust, and heat of the mine, with its peculiar smells, to this leisurely bath of sunlight, and rare, sweet-scented air gave a sense of exquisite dreamy restfulness, soothing to the body and mind. Over the stile was a large field where the long grass now and then bent before the gentle breeze. By and by I crossed over and lay down in it, almost hidden, everything shut out of my world but the blue above. And so I lay, boylike, dreaming, "untroubled and untroubling. Green grass below: above, the vaulted sky."

That was my way in the summer. Miles away in the morning, book in hand, reading, scenting the earth and its products, sleeping, sometimes with face buried in the

grass. Half waking again, dreaming, watching the swaying grass, the dot of life away up in the blue, poising as it reached the crescendo of its song then dropping stone-like to the earth. The mellow call of a thrush, the hum and drone of multitudinous, infinitesimal life, and the soothing rustle of the wind among the myriad green blades. That exquisite sense of rest well won, as though one was suspended between a world that was and yet was not, near the heart of the Infinite, that magnetised and melted one, until you were part of the miraculous, eternal whole.

"Blessed are the single-hearted: for they shall enjoy much peace."

"Affect not to be otherwise, but rather acknowledge thine own ignorance."

"It is great wisdom and perfection to esteem nothing of ourselves and to think always well and highly of others."

So did I read in my pocket Thomas à Kempis as I strolled back home.

But sometimes I read: "A feeling very generally exists that the condition of the working classes is a rather ominous matter at present: that something ought to be said, something ought to be done about it." And I knew that, just as à Kempis, long, long ago, spoke the thought within me, so too did Carlyle give blunt answer to the questions that would come, in spite of the old monk who would suppress all questions of this world's affairs. One knew of things eternal and spoke wise words of them, but the other knew that scanty, sweating, turgid life over there in the colliery where I could see the long rows of houses standing like a regiment at attention, and above all the pit-gear and great chimney smoking lazily, at rest after the week's work. The old Chelsea man had never been there, or down in the shades, but he knew all about it, and the problems it set for an answer, and he answered them too.

Strange companions, ancient St. Thomas on one hand

and modern Seer Thomas on the other. The old, gentle ; the modern, thundering ; one withdrawing you from the world of affairs, the other leading you in the charge right into the midst of them. Two philosophers who were one : two teachers, complementary, talking by the wayside to a rough-clad, pit-lad who was making his way home to breakfast in a colliery house.

Men sitting on the doorstep in trousers and shirt, sleeves up, breast exposed, gave me friendly, intimate "Good morning, Jack," all the way up the main street. All doors open. Chalk numbers on the doors telling the caller whether to knock at three or five o'clock in the morning. But "callers" dispensed with, for a short space, forgotten. This day we are all free, and sit in the sun. At home, sizzling, fragrant bacon, a pitman's appetite with a long walk to help it, and bread new baked by mother yesterday. Pit-clothes and boots out of sight, floor scrubbed, fireside burnished ; art of gentle fingers everywhere apparent. And the breakfast was, as the rest in the field, part of the whole.

• Upstairs in the big room all is peace. We have a front room now, but it is quieter upstairs. Brothers have risen, had breakfast, and cleared out, so I shut the door and another world is all my own. Mother knows my habit ; and woe betide any who would even unknowingly disturb "oor John." Ah, mother, who gave me life, drudged and toiled for me, volcanic mother, you were rarely understanding, and had a great mind in that heart you kept locked up against the world. For you thought with your heart, and the world's wise ones could learn much from you in that.

The orange-boxes painted, with brown paper covering, tastefully cut at the edges, now held many books. Standing in a corner upon each other, they made a rough bookcase. My own books—a few dozen. History on one shelf, poetry another ; fiction here, classics there. My own books in my own room. The sunlight on the garden and street, while the sparrow family converses in the spout

above the window. There is worn, old, brown leaved Gibbon, four volumes of him; real morocco-backed Shakespeare and the Bible; ragged Tennyson; and Milton as stiff and tough and inviting as his lines. All my own. You with your libraries, hundred shelved, finely backed, softly carpeted, easy chaired, light "just so," may you get the entrancing hours I had in mine, seated on a bed, in an oil-cloth covered bedroom, with those few books in the orange-box bookcase, on a pay Saturday morning in summer—even though there was not much pay.

Then to stroll up the street in the cool of the evening, with fresh flowered gardens on either side. The morning sun in the fields, the talk with the two Thomases, breakfast, the day in the library, and scent of the flowers in the cool of the evening were all part of the perfect whole.

It was fitting that on such an evening a great thing should happen to me—a fitting crown to a perfect day; that the golden day of release should also bring romance.

I was neither better nor worse than others at twenty-one in respect to this sweetheart business, even if I did read books. But, though the heart was not silent on the matters which are its supreme business at twenty-one, I lived aloof. In the very vortex of life's battle for bread, with naked body of jet and shaved dusty head, living the life of tooth and claw, I was yet aloof; in the "scrum" of affairs concerning the working life of the colliery, but withdrawn into myself when the shouting was over. Day by day, for years, the pit took hold and wrung out the last ounce of energy—but I still lived in a world beyond these things. The mind was concentrated on the infinite details of the work, but it was never clamped down by them. "To do" never conquered "to know," but rather was a whip for it. But neither doing nor knowing can blot out the fact of bonny lasses all around when you are twenty-one.

So on the evening of a perfect day in the summer-time, just as it is in story-books, I met "Her." She lived in

Sunderland, and was visiting friends in the colliery when I met her with a girl friend whom I also knew. The stranger within the gates was small, dainty, with black hair, sweeping black eyebrows, grey eyes, and natural colour of carmine—a servant-girl with the ingrained quality stamped on her from head to feet. Note that, you advanced literary "lions" who allude in your writings to servant-girls, and be more cautious than ever to-day when you sometimes mistake the petty bourgeoisie mind for a lofty intellectual pose. Quality is nobody's special preserve, and neither wealth nor social status can give it. Quality is in the kitchen as well as in the drawing-room, and the marks of its presence, or absence, in either place are plain and abundant. This is common knowledge, of course, but there is reason to remind the "intelligentsia" of it.

This servant-girl of quality had worked for her living from her fourteenth year, entirely relying on herself—and sparing a little for other people. What with eyes, aliveness, gentleness, and perfect English, I completely forgot Goths, philosophy, and pits. I remembered I wore a cheap brown, ill-fitting suit. That was the kind of thing I delighted in—philosopher-in-his-tub pose. I would not get measured for a suit, and would not even go to the Store to try on a "ready-made," so the suit as a rule was loose all over, sleeves on knuckles, and trousers well "bagged." Comb, brush, or "hair polish" were for the effeminate. I not only despised appearance as became a philosopher, but deliberately cultivated contempt for it. Truth is, I was a prude, and more conceited than a dandy. Yes, I was a crude prude. For I was nothing to brag about in appearance, even if a West End tailor had tested his talent on me.

Now when you meet a neat, sweet, finely spoken young lady on a summer's eve in such clothes, even your philosophy doesn't go far, so I sought to cover crudeness by parading it, and I matched her perfect English by an emphasised dialect. I shocked her—but she made me

conscious of my suit, and of something wrong somewhere. Do you wonder I went and got measured by the tailor, and began to think a barber might do more for me than the "hair cut" by the horsekeeper down the pit, who sheared me with the same shears he used for the pit ponies. Alas, for philosophy! There is certainly something in that Samson story.

After that meeting I met this lady again—by accident. It always is, of course. Lovers know all about these accidental meetings. Then by "accident" we met at the seaside on the occasion of a carnival. I should have been a couple of thousand feet below surface that night, but my philosophy had deserted me—or, rather, I had been shorn of it—so I went to the carnival with a certain Clem Todd. By accident we met this young lady and another, and by accident I lost them both—but not the one with good grey eyes. We found ourselves sitting together watching bright-coloured lights on shore and sea. Romance all round, romance within; two hands clasped and held. She says it was me, I say it wasn't, but neither of us has ever cared which it was so long as it was done. We wouldn't undo or exchange the memory of it for all the Hollywood romances put together. That was the result of meeting a maid on the evening of a summer's day which had begun for me far out in the fields where the larks sang and the gentle wind brought the scent of clover and new-mown hay. She too was part of the eternal whole.

CHAPTER XIII

The Pit Row

WE NOW LIVED IN THE PIT ROW—OR PIT RAA, AS WE CALLED it. Our family had climbed a rung of the social ladder—we had now four rooms: two bedrooms, kitchen, and a

front room. A Front Room! A place to which one could retire when the battalion was in camp or kitchen. A place where the pit-clothes came not, and where washing-days were unknown. It was furnished with a leather suite, including an armchair, a couch, and my parents' bed.

At first we explored that room, tried the armchair, lay on the couch—and then went back to the kitchen. We had been so long together that it took some time to learn to be alone. Though I cannot truthfully say that "the more we are together the happier we will be" was true in our case. But there was no bed in the kitchen, so there was more room.

Our higher social status was due to our increased number of workers. We were worth more to the company. This was the standard accepted of all men. We had argued in the union meeting that we were due for a four-roomed house because we had five workers. The union said we were. The company had to agree, as they had made the law. So there we were with four rooms.

The house had a high wall at the back. That was part of the great wall around the pit-yard. At the front was a small garden and the waste-heap, hideous and high, with great waggons always standing there. We called it the home-made mountain. That was the scenery from the front room window. But what of that? A whole room to myself to read in, and an armchair to sit in, or even a couch to lie on. Sheer luxury.

There were five boys—three of us men. There were five girls—three of them women. Two bedrooms, and two beds in each room. Five of us were working in the pit—with my father. Tommy—younger than myself—was now working, so what with four rooms and five workers we were getting quite well-to-do. Willie was now going to school, and was still the apple of mother's eye. He alone knew that affection of which she was capable. Ice to all of us when she was not a flame of wrath, she softened to Willie, and did not now hide it. Sometimes she was

covertly kind to me, for it was plain she esteemed me as knowledgeable. That was a sign of growth even in maturity. But the thing that did stand out was her love for Willie, which had grown until she neither could nor cared to hide it. And, indeed, we all "made" of him, for he was good to look at, intelligent, and warm in his relation to us all. He and I linked as though we were of an age, for he was early a lover of books. What little I could do to encourage him I did. Perhaps mother enlarged a little towards me because of this; perhaps it was because I was now a money-getter of some importance; but I think she had something more than respect for one who could read, and possessed books. But when all was said she was still stiff, as though affection was a weakness—except with Willie. And he responded so that the winsomeness of him drew us all, and he had the affection of us all. That was unusual in the family, for whether reserve had begot reserve, or whether we had inherited it from mother I know not, but we never were prone to fall on each other's necks, although we were real comrades in after years when the home days were over. But from birth to manhood Willie won us all, thawing the family like the warm sun emerging on a wintry day.

We workers went down the pit and came out of it at all hours of the day. Mother and sisters were either preparing to send some of us out, or cooking for others coming in. Those who went down at four came out at eleven in the morning. The six and nine o'clock workers returned at four-thirty in the afternoon. The night shift went down at four, six, nine. The strenuous life philosophy, so strenuously preached by President Roosevelt, was old news to us—but it had lost its attraction if it ever had any.

Like others, I had my turns in the night shift—six to four. I celebrated my twenty-first birthday by going down at six as usual. We were not of the "many happy returns" kind. But I was glad I was going out with my back to her that night when mother said good night. For she said, "Good neet, me lad." Such terms of endear

ment and such a tone—so unusual as to be embarrassing. That was my "coming of age" celebration.

But I was going off to my night-club until four in the morning, so I didn't mind. Twenty-one, and ten hours of blood-for-money in darkest England before me. But the truth is, it didn't occur to me in that way. The feel of the muscles and set of the body; the tacit admission into the front rank among good workers; the sense of sway in union meetings; the consciousness of knowledge acquired and the unfolding of purpose in my life—that was good. Egotism! True. It is the right of twenty-one. A whipcord body, a stomach that could digest nails, a head that keeps control, makes hard things easy. To-morrow there is English grammar when I get up. Whoever invented grammar? "A noun is the name of a person or thing." "A verb is——"

"Hello, Jack!"

"Whatcheer?"

"They tell me thy men's in the right side th' neet."

"Hoo's that?"

"She's doon in the left side. Been playing hell all day. Smashed aal the timber. Men had t' clear oot."

Exit verbs.

Enter "she" who was of coal, stone, timber, floor, and roof. "She" heaving underfoot, cracking, bending, smashing timber, crushing coal, moaning, crying, threatening hour after hour, away down in the black regions, until "She" in her wrath, with one vast roar, makes of the ordered working-place one solid mass of rock, so that men shall never more walk or work there. But that was an incident. Business as usual. The men are on the "right side," where day is night and night is day, so that night shift is just the same as day shift when once you get down.

And some authority has sagely pointed out that "the mine is not subjected to variations of weather," and also that the mine is really safer than the streets of London,

according to statistics. So tie yourself in knots, be a heavy-weight lifter, speed up the pony express, and when, fully clad in shoes and stockings, you try to wipe the sticky mixture of coal-dust and sweat out of your eyes, remember that point about the variation of weather. But I was twenty-one, and we had a front room in the Pit Raa where one could learn grammar.

And there was also a trim little figure with wide sweeping eyebrows and grey eyes who lived by the sea. And I had always liked the sea, so on odd occasions I forgot I was in the night shift, or any other, and went down to the sea. But I called on the said lady also and took her with me, for I always liked people who could share my pleasure in the things I liked. So away we went along the sands, where I breathed deep the salt air, which cleansed and revived after the pit. The long rolling waves of the North Sea broke on the rocks where I had cooked limpets and mussels as a ragged, barefooted youngster, a vagrant for the day—a day for which I would have to answer to mother. And this new form of vagrancy was all the sweeter for the memory, specially that I knew there would be the suspicion of a twinkle in mother's eye when I returned, instead of a stern face and heavy hand. For mother liked my choice, and gave her warm welcome. Which, you will understand from all I have said, was no small matter. If she had not passed the test, mother would have said so and enjoyed the saying of it. I should not have worried about that, for we at home had spent years trying to persuade her to be "nicer" with people, but it was labour in vain, for she was sharp with most, "nice" with few, and rarely really warm with any. But there was no mistake about her attitude to the girl who walked the miles along the seashore with me. The wind in our face, the surf sound, the fragrance of the seaweed, and the old boy dreams all tuned me to talk of the things I had thought of for years. She had worked for herself since she was a child, gathered experience, was strong-minded, deferred to none, and was amazingly independent

in her views of life. I went down to the sea as often as possible to hear her views, and she came to the colliery to hear mine. Modern youth is sceptical, and will smile at this. But modern youth is just like youth in any age or clime. Romance still holds the field. Lovers are lovers, whether wise or foolish. And even the wise can be foolish when in love. Whether we were one or the other I cannot judge, for all I know is we were just sweethearts, and they are ever the same.

CHAPTER XIV

Marriage

BELLS. RINGING BELLS. WEDDING BELLS. AT HALF-PAST eight on a morning in February the old church bells at Boldon Colliery brought the people in the nearest streets to their doors—just what I had planned should not happen. I had given the church bell-ringer a "tip," and he had agreed not to make the wedding bells ring out—but he had also a sense of humour. He didn't merely ring; he clashed and whirled them in a way which was startling. My wife and I had neither taxi nor cab—nor anything. We walked the whole length of the colliery while the bells rang. Men in shirt-sleeves, with braces down; and their wives beside them, shouted good wishes and "pulled our legs" as we passed along that sunny morning. I laughed, but felt like assassinating that bell-ringer. So my wife and I started, with the bells and the sun and neighbourly goodwill, just like it says in the story-books. There must be days in which the whole world seems wrong to the man, while the wife thinks the world would be all right if it were not for his bad temper. And there are times when he would swear she just decided to wash the clothes that day ~~she was~~. All lovers know the rose-coloured days will

our work. But for both of us the dream of what the world might be.

The Socialist movement had both of us in its grip. I had now become an active speaker. We had a regular plan of speakers who covered the two northern counties in the spring, summer, and autumn; it was all open-air work. The "Osborne" judgment, so stupidly dictated by class prejudice, had roused many workers who previously had given little or no thought to politics. But this attack on union funds was so flagrantly unjust that it awoke many to see that there are different standards of law for different classes. Probably legal men would resent that statement in the abstract, but that was how it was seen by the worker. That judgment was the keynote of speeches pleading for a distinct working-class party in Parliament as well as the general exposition of Socialism.

When one looks at the great Labour Party which has formed its second Government, and the Socialist movement of to-day, it is scarcely possible to believe that those days of which I write are hardly twenty-five years away. In those days the worker did not believe in himself or his own potential power. There was no Miners' Minimum Wage, no Health Insurance, no Unemployed Benefit, no Labour Representation on Local Councils, and only one or two in Parliament, and there was Ten Hours a Day in the Mines. Those who talked of Labour representatives and Socialism were treated with indifference. We speakers would end our day in the shipyard, shop, or mine, take a bath, eat a hasty dinner, then cycle many miles to speak at an open-air meeting. When we got there, often our audience was the proverbial man and a dog—and even the dog was welcome. If a few men did come round and ask us questions, we were grateful. But if we appeared to make some headway, there were sometimes those who could be insultingly hostile. Even that was better than indifference. Of course, the logic of youth was probably doubtful and its eloquence not exactly catching, but,

good or bad, it was all the same. That was characteristic of Durham. For the men of Durham were Liberal, and we Socialists were fools. It was a great life, for with the new-born passion and zeal of converts ourselves we knew every brother and sister in the movement.

It was indeed a case of "two or three being gathered together." We didn't expect our cause to be victorious in our lifetime. I will swear that among the men who took part in the Socialist campaign at that time none expected the workers to have such power in local and national politics as they do to-day, in less than a century. We were visionaries, friars of a new Order in which service was its own reward. Few even of the intelligent workers before that time believed either in the possibility of such a change or desired it. But it is not merely a change in parties or politics that has taken place. It is a change of social values. Deep and fundamental is that change. And to none is it more miraculous than to the scattered few who stood upon boxes at street corners, talking to the distantly indifferent, and then cycled wearily but happily home to get a little sleep before the next shift began. Of them it could well have been truly said, "For your reward is in heaven."

CHAPTER XV

A Naked Philosopher

ONE MORNING, IN THE WINTER OF 1905, JACK WOODWARD and I were working double at the coal-face. Jack was a Welshman, and a man of exceptional literary taste. He had wriggled and twisted like a shadowy thing behind curtains of dust all the morning—in a place which we called good because the coal came rather easy. First the pick and then the shovel, so we paced each other like

two steam navvy machines. With naked, dust-caked bodies, sweat-squirting shoes, and head between legs, we filled tub after tub, each of which held fourteen hundred-weight, as though they were thimbles. If coal was easy, prices were low, and it took a lot of tubs to make a day's pay. I can see Woodward now, in the meagre light of a lamp that looked like the "snot" of a far-off candle—I can see the wraith-like figure of him as he talked books. The shovel squealed against the hard stone floor, then leaped over the tub its burden of coal, coming back for more almost before it had started. Back and forward, back and forward, until, the tub filled, the pick was biting the coal as though driven by a machine. Thus we worked and talked, swallowing our peck of dust every minute. So was I introduced to George Borrow by Jack Woodward. But when I admitted I only knew Borrow by repute—that stopped the machine altogether. He came over to me and demanded to know if I was actually so stupid as I looked, and blighted that I had not read *Romney Rye and Wild Wales*. The man was—well, you know what a Welshman is when he enthuses over anything or anybody. Almost I felt as though I had committed a crime, and I certainly felt *Wild Wales* was an apt description. But when my working mate began chanting portions of *Wild Wales*—for to say he quoted would be tame and inaccurate—lo, in that gloomy, dusty working-place, five yards wide, four feet high, a couple of thousand feet below ground, the green carpeted fields and distant mountains appeared like magic. There stood the poet and painter in soggy shoes and stockings, with dust-caked naked body, conjuring up *Wild Wales* in a densely dusty cavern in the earth's bowels. When this Professor of Literature, who never professed to know anything, had again resumed his shovel, I timidly turned the subject to Ruskin, who was just at that time receiving my homage. His plea for art, education, and a decent life for the toiler aroused mutual enthusiasm in us. Thus did I find encouragement for the expression of my con-

viction of a full education for the two-legged mule of industry. Here was an understanding, patient listener, and I took full advantage of it. I was carried away on the swift current of my own words, vague and dreamlike it is true, but understood by one of like mind. Again he came over to me and said: "You know, you should go to Oxford." That broke the spell, for it seemed so funny. Me go to Oxford, a place which was in the land of Never-Never. But Woodward was serious, and it was then I learned for the first time that there was more that was practical than poetic in these views I had nurtured in me until they had become an abiding passion. For it appeared some well-to-do dreamer had established a place of learning for men who worked with their hands, in the heart of the world's great centre of learning. We hewed and shovelled, bent and squirmed, doing the hardest graft that men could do in a grim practical world, while Woodward expounded the new movement and drew me out. Still, Oxford was impossible; its streets were of crystal, and the city was not made with hands. Famed in national--indeed, in world history—I had read of it and its work as one reads the glorious Revelation of John. But Woodward was older, and could see many things even in that dark corner of the earth. He held on to me. There was a correspondence class run in connection with the college in Oxford, and why shouldn't I join it? Yes, why not? So I went home and joined that day. Whether my old workmate ever knew what he did for me that morning at the coal-face I cannot say, but the memory of it is a treasure beyond earthly price.

* * * * *

I had been married nearly a year when I returned from work one day and found a letter awaiting me. It was a letter from the Ruskin College authorities offering me a six months' scholarship if I would find the twenty-six

pounds to pay for another six months—and thus stay a year in Oxford. Twenty-six pounds! Live in Oxford! And me married! I was about as likely to find myself the possessor of twenty-six pounds—to say nothing of expenses in Oxford—as I was to find twenty-six million pounds. We had a little furniture in three rooms, and my wife could work wonders with nothing—but twenty-six pounds! If you only knew the isolation of collieries at that time, and the hell-for-leather work one did in the pit with such little returns, you would understand the joke of that letter. And, anyhow, I was married. That ended the matter, and I should have thrown the letter almost casually in the fire. But the wife did not see the joke. She never will; she's just that way. It didn't seem so silly to her. But how was this thing possible? Well, she had been in service ten years, and she could always manage another one. You know, I fell in love afresh with her for that. But, even with that Crusader spirit, where was the money to come from? She waved her hands round the place, saying, "Here it is," as though banknotes were scattered all over the kitchen. It was some time before I realised that she meant there was a little money in the furniture. But, even then, where was Oxford? How much would it take to get there and to live there? Who in our colliery knew anything about it, anyhow? Did the wife understand I would come back to the pit again, and if I did wouldn't the people think us "cracked" or failures? Yes, she understood all that, but didn't see anything to worry about.

I ate my dinner, and bathed like one in a dream, and then went to see the local vicar about this thing. He knew nothing about it, and didn't know what to make of the matter. The idea of a pitman going to Oxford was beyond him, but the idea of coming back to the pit again was even a greater mystery. Good old man that he was, he thought that I might by a miracle get into the Church. When I made it clear that the last thing I wanted

was a miracle of that kind to happen, he gave it up, but made the useful and helpful suggestion that I might go to Whitburn and see the rector there. This was useful, because the rector was our County Councillor, and an ardent educationalist and social worker. That was Canon Moore Ede, who is now Dean of Worcester. I arranged to see him at the week-end. In the meantime my father and mother promised ten pounds towards the venture—which will show you the changed attitude of my father towards my cranky book-boring ways. But to no one else but my parents had we mentioned this Quixotic adventure—and I would not have told my parents but that the local vicar, who was intimate with my father, had told him of my visit and desires.

On a windy Saturday we walked the few miles to Whitburn to interview the Canon. My wife stayed outside. The churchman did not know till long after that she was with me. He took me into the library and questioned me about my object. He had not met me before, and naturally wanted to know the kind of person he was dealing with. This involved many questions, which I answered in a stiff-backed manner. I told him I was a miner and a Socialist. I had conceived that neither of these things were popular with the clergy, so I told him about them in a sort of put-that-in-your-pipe and smoke it manner. I was twenty-five years old, strong, had never asked anyone for anything in my life, and never would. And if this man could not understand me—which was not likely—then I would bid him good night. But there are a lot of things one doesn't know at twenty-five, and I learnt one of them that night; that a lot of people in utterly dissimilar walks of life can have similar ideals. And when the cleric had bored me through and through with his eyes and questions, he said, "You'll do," and showed an understanding of me that was astonishing. He then talked ways and means, as though the thing I had come to talk about was an accomplished fact. I told him I was coming back to the pit; he took that for

granted—even me. How much money had I? I said I had two picks. At that he laughed, and offered to give me five pounds and collect five more. With my father's gift, that would make twenty. I was to find the other six, and train fare and expenses—which appeared indefinitely fabulous. Still, it was such a simple, easy thing to do in this man's presence, and I promised. Where it was coming from I didn't know, but he seemed to think it was all right, and my wife did too ; so it must be possible. We walked back to Boldon on the air—but the coming days brought us back to earth all right.

Working-class organisations were to come to an understanding in later years of the thing which held me, and to give it generous aid in that fine spirit of sacrifice which marks the miner and his organisations. But the time was not yet. I did not get a penny from working-class organisations, and, apart from the personal gifts stated, the wife and I paddled our own canoe on this journey into the uncharted parts of the earth—which was what Oxford was to us at that time.

CHAPTER XVI

Oxford

STREETS OF QUIET IMPRESSIVE BUILDINGS ; MASSES OF grey stones so wonderfully fixed and marvellously wrought upon that they seemed things out of dreams—a city called a University, so unlike industrial England that it seemed unreal. When one has spent the years of one's life in the midst of the long, brick barracks of a colliery, and more than a dozen years in the heat and dust of dark, long, low passages in the mine, with the unrelenting drive of industrial life behind, and then landed in a quiet, leisurely place where these things are unguessed—when one has

such an experience as this, then waking is sleeping, and, whether sleeping or waking, it is all one long dream.

Was this really England, this backwater of life where never a buzzer blew or a caller beat his tattoo upon the door in the zero hour? My wife had come up to Oxford and had taken a situation in the city while I was a student in Ruskin College. When we could we ran and walked the streets, and explored the buildings and gardens. We were like two amazed children. With the experience of men and women behind us of a grimly practical life we wandered through this new world as though life was just beginning. We had twenty-six pounds in the bank for my next half year's fees, and that was our all. She was working in domestic service, and I was combining study with some domestic service in College—but the mist of romance was over all.

In Ruskin College we went to lectures every morning after we had performed other important duties. For everyone in turn either prepared breakfast for sixty men or served it, or washed up the dishes afterwards. And everyone had to clean his room, and make his bed, before lecture at eleven o'clock. The evasion or scamping of such duties carried rigorously enforced penalties. At the week-end you put on an apron, took a bucket of water, soap, and scrubbing-brush, and thoroughly scrubbed such steps or passages as had been allotted to you. In this way the College and all buildings connected with it were scrubbed from top to bottom every week and cleaned daily also. The Scrub List was just as important as the Lecture List—and its educational value not less. These humble duties were changed round every week, so that in a year you had scrubbed every portion of the buildings inside and out, had learned to cook porridge, bacon and eggs, make the tea, wash the dishes, and be responsible for the proper performance of all duties for the sixty students. It was a great experience, an amazing experiment, and amazingly successful.

To me it was simply a return to duties with which I

was familiar in boyhood; it was like child's play compared with my work in the mine. Practically everybody fell into the routine, so that the co-operation of this community was as perfect as it could be in this very human world. True, there were a few who were not proficient, and a few who did not want to be. For mamma's pets are not confined to any one class, and the pampered gentleman who thought such duties a thing of drudgery, and humiliating to his lordly self—these were also there. But we soon knew them, and had gentle means of correcting wrong estimates. When the high and mighty, or the sluggard, had been held under the pump by enthusiastic students, who were encouraged by cheering supporters, such erring ones learnt there were more things in heaven and earth than they had dreamed of. Then, of course, there was the person who never could appreciate institutional life. He is always with us, wherever boys ~~or men~~ are called upon to live together, whether it is in schools or homes of any kind. He will find fault because he doesn't know the hen that laid the egg which is put before him, or because there are not plenty of raisins in the pudding. His chief hobby when at home has been tazzing the wife or his mother, because the bacon is too fat or too lean when they know very well he likes it fat—and anyhow he doesn't like bacon at all. Granted all the economic theory you like, or any you want, the fact still remains that in the working class or out of it, when it comes to batching together, men are very human, and if anyone thinks his fellow-workers are exceptional let them try living in the way we were doing and then they will be wiser. We were wonderful, taking all in all, and had great fellowship, but in a few cases mothers must have been happier for the absence of their beloved sons. That is a plain blunt fact which must be grasped if any institution is to be reasonably successful. And we grasped it all right, for we could not shunt the trouble-maker on to any committee, as we were all the committee and the job was ours.

At that time the Principal of the College was the late Dennis Hird, an uncompromising, unconventional man, the Vice-Principal was Lees Smith, who has since been Minister of Education. The Principal lectured to us on sociology, a very wide field in which we all got lost, though we all pretended we knew where we were. The Vice-Principal took us in economics, another corner of the same field with which we all claimed to be familiar. One of our men had read Marx, and he was far above all economists, so we all took to reading Marxian theory. After that we listened to the lectures on economics as men showing great tolerance. We had read Marx, so we knew it all. Which frame of mind has become very familiar since that time. The one thing most of us didn't know was that we knew nothing—which is the beginning of wisdom. Still, most of us had plugged our way through a very hard, matter-of-fact world, and were so familiar with the facts of the thing that we were not inclined to yield easily to theories about it. The law of diminishing returns reads well in a text-book, but it doesn't look quite so well when expressed in fact on your pay note. But Lees Smith was a persuasive, patient, enthusiastic teacher, ~~who~~ gave many years of ungrudging, sacrificing labour to the College in its unpopular days and he helped us very much.

And here I will take the opportunity of paying my tribute to Dennis Hird, Lees Smith, the late Bertram Wilson (who was secretary), Dr. Carlyle, Professor Sidney Ball, Mr. Hacking, Miss Giles, and later Charlie Buxton, Mr. and Mrs. Sanderson Furnis (now Lord and Lady Sanderson). These good people championed a cause which was received with derision by the world generally, and with hostility in the University particularly. *Punch* had great fun over the experiment, and there were many battles between Ruskin and University men.

By 1907, through the influence of A. L. Smith (Master of Balliol), Dr. Fisher (Ex-Minister of Education), Dr.

Streeter, of Queen's, William Temple (now Archbishop of Canterbury), Dr. Carlyle and others—Ruskin men were admitted to many University lectures. I, in common with others, had that privilege. But we were never allowed to forget we lived in a hostile centre. Of course we were not cast down, but rather enjoyed the situation. In fact, we prided ourselves that we were not as other men, and sought means of showing it. We did not wear cap and gown, but rather delighted in emphasising the difference by deliberately wearing the dingiest clothes. We fixed up Socialist meetings at the Martyr's Memorial, well knowing that it would precipitate a conflict with masses of undergraduates, who would certainly regard the meeting as a challenge and joyously accept it. We used the most lurid language about the capitalist class and pointedly included Oxford University, its Fellows, proctors, and undergraduates, in that class. I remember how one of our men, who spoke with a Cockney accent, at one meeting, with a sweep of the arms, included the assembled undergrads as the bourgeoisie. But he called it Bow-ger-wow-sie. Every time he said "Bow-ger-wow-sie" there was a bow-wow-wow like the bark of a pack of dogs from the men in cap and gown. The end of it was a free fight, flying Ruskin men, and the windows of the College smashed with bricks. That recurred fairly often. But for all that there was a good deal of personal friendship with the undergrads, and many friendships were made which have stood the test of the years. I remember the son of a peer of the realm once coming down to have supper with us, which consisted of a mug of tea and bread and cheese. We impressed upon him the great honour we had bestowed by letting him cut and butter his own bread and bringing him back to wash his mug—which was our custom. That was poor Charlie Lister, who died of wounds in the war, and who was a very unorthodox, uncompromising friend of the workers.

Sometimes we were engaged in conflict beyond the

bounds of the University. On one occasion we joined issue on the temperance question. We really didn't care twopence about it, but the Brewers seemed to be having things all their own way so we clubbed together a few shillings to get handbills printed, calling upon the citizens of Oxford to rise like lions from their slumber and attend a Tory meeting in the City Hall, which was advertised by posters all over the place.

The citizens certainly did rise. They packed the hall from floor to ceiling - though I'm not so sure they were as much interested in temperance as they were at being in at the kill. For we Ruskinites had certainly got the stage, although we sat in the centre of the hall. The Duke of Marlborough was in the chair, and Lord Carson was the chief speaker. Practising the first principles of a good platform man, he pinned the attention of the meeting on our hostile block. He enjoyed himself, and so did we, for the meeting was ours from the first. Picked, hefty men as stewards were massed on both sides of us. Lord Carson put questions, and we answered. Skilled, lawyer-like snares were laid, and we were caught in them, but by jeer and joke we freed ourselves. When he finished we wanted to put questions. This was refused. As free citizens we would not be put down. A steward tried to do it, but he was unfortunate enough to try his hand on a muscular gentleman whose chief hobby was boxing and heavy-weight lifting—one George Brown, now an organiser for the railwaymen. George took the opportunity of a little practice, and knocked the brewers' dray-horse in trousers flat. Several more went the same way. Then the engagement became general. Women screamed and fainted, chairs were flying. Battles had broken out in other parts of the hall, and the war was going full swing when a body of police arrived. Our fellows were bundled out, though how it was done I don't know. Somehow two human dray-horses hoisted me shoulder high and pitched me rudely into the muddy street. That was my first experience of being "chaired" by the British public, and I didn't like it.

There were black eyes galore, and we finished up in real good style for all the windows of the College were broken, according to custom. I certainly was becoming a politician.

There were other experiences of a different nature. The low-lying city, with its relaxing air, had not agreed with my wife. She seemed to be very ill, and had to leave her situation and go into lodgings. This meant worry and some portion of next half-year's fees drawn out of the bank. Lees Smith heard of it, and, like his good self, wanted to help. My wife and I were very self-righteously independent, so there was nothing doing. It was a grey time, but she got better, and went to another situation. We never had a penny to spend on anything, but we revelled in the new life. We met new people, had new experiences, and made many friends. I went to lectures everyday, read at large as I had always desired to do and scrubbed the College steps in a coarse apron.

At the end of the first year, when my money was finished, I was offered a further six months free for the coming year. But there was a vacation during December and January. We scraped up the train-fare and I returned to Durham. The manager was decent, and gave me work for that period, but it was not possible to fit me in as a hewer, so I went to shift work—or labouring—in the mine. I still think kindly of that understanding overman, who had a twinkle in his eye when he said, "Is it work thoo wants, or money?" "Money," I said. So I was given a special bit of work to do where I got a little extra money, and the two months' money came in handy.

In February of 1908 I began my second year in College. There were lots of new men, and not the least change was that Charlie Buxton (son of the President of the Board of Trade at that time) had been made Vice-Principal. A descendant of Fowell Buxton, the great slave liberator, and cousin to the well-known Labour Party Buxton, he had all the independence and marks of the family upon

him. Unfortunately, his brilliant and useful career was cut short by death a few years later.

By the middle of that year I was literally on the rocks as far as clothes were concerned. But I had made good friends, and two of them, Arnold Freeman, who has done great work in the Sheffield Settlement, and good hearted Marsh Roberts tried artfully to come to the rescue. But there was nothing doing. This was the job of my wife and myself, and we treated ourselves to the luxury of paddling our own canoe. There was no virtue in our independence for we literally enjoyed standing on our own legs. She had got placed in the home of a bookseller in Oxford and he and his wife were more friends than employers. They had a beautifully situated house on Cumnor Hill, so in spite of everything we were happy. Did we not stand on ground made sacred by Sir Walter Scott and see on the hill the trees associated with Arnold's "Scholar Gipsy"? Could we not wander in "the Broad" and imagine where Jude the Obscure had died reciting his Litany of Pessimism from Job, "Let the day be blotted out when it was said a man child is born"? Lincoln College spoke to us of Wesley; University of Shelley; and we walked with Addison in Magdalen. Every street and every building was alive with historic and literary character and incident, while villages in the country around, quaint and old-world, told their historic tales to us. If we trod this ground in shabby clothes, it was worth it, for the things and people we had read about as in a far-off time and distant land had become real and living to us. There was no hardship, for we companied in spirit with the great of the earth, and many of them had been poorer than we.

About the middle of my second year I was informed that the College Council had decided to give me the whole year. I was grateful, but felt I was at the end of my tether. Mr. Dennis Hird invited me to his room, and told me that some friends desired that I should enter the University and take a degree. I was to enter Manchester College, where Estlin Carpenter was Principal, and Mr. Hird

would prepare me for the entrance exam. I was grateful, but refused. Mr. Hird pressed me, but I told him I was going back to the picks and the pit, in pursuance of my ideal. He asked me to think it over, and invited my wife and me to tea. He told us that arrangements had been made for us to live together in our own rooms until I took my degree. As a matter of fact, I learned afterwards that Charlie Buxton and A. L. Smith were behind the arrangement as far as finance and influence were concerned. We both refused. I did not want a professional career. I was of the pits, and would spend my life there, demonstrating, in fact, that a manual worker might be an educated man, and that education would end his life of low standards in return for grinding work. So we thanked those great-hearted, considerate people who had designed this thing, and went our way.

About three months later I bought a second-hand jacket and waistcoat for three and sixpence and the wife and I returned to Boldon Colliery. We had gone out, following the will-o'-the-wisp of our dreams: it led us back to the starting-place, and as far as we were concerned it ended there. That I would ever do any other work than hew coal we never dreamed. I had no ambition but to make my old dream a reality. Some there were who voted us fools, to others we were a mystery. But we were rich in experience though we had but two scantily furnished rooms and our potential wealth lay in my two picks.

CHAPTER XVII

Back to the Pit

WE NOW LIVED IN TWO UPSTAIRS ROOMS, NEXT TO THE school which I had attended as a boy; and the two rooms had something to spare when all our furniture was set down

in them. I was back at my old work as a coal hewer, at which thirty shillings a week was considered reasonable pay. So the net result of my reading and academic adventure was that at twenty seven years of age my wife and I had two sparsely furnished rented rooms, not a penny in hand, and I had a suit which had cost three and sixpence—for the trousers, which were not made for me, had cost nothing, and "fitted where they touched." Still, the "get up" was unique, that is the next best thing to being well dressed, so on the principle that if you can't swank, then be original, I enjoyed myself. And my wife and I were really happy. We had seen the outside world, made many friends, lived in a beautiful old city until we pined for the bustle and baffle of the real working world, had achieved our impossible adventure and were now settled. Yes, settled, for as far as we were concerned our life's work was there, and my farthest journey would take me to the coal-face.

That colliery was my world, as it had been before, but with a great difference. I had looked on it from outside, I had seen it as a unit in the variegated national setting, and I had seen mining as merely part of the whole of industry. Before my journeying I was subjective, with the pit-gear of my colliery as the boundary of my vision, but now I saw it objectively and knew it to be part of a great world system. But, though my horizon was wider, I repeat I had no regrets at returning, but was rather defiantly proud that I had returned, and been true to the Pole Star of my dream and vision. I say defiantly proud, for there were naturally a few around who expressed curiosity as to what game I was up to. I don't wonder, for I sometimes laugh at myself. But I certainly did get a "kick out of it," as we say to-day. Indeed, offers of posts that would have taken me out of the pit at much better wages came my way, but were refused because they would have taken me out of the mid-current of things industrial. The mid-current was a four foot high place in a district in the mine called "Kitty's Drift." Who the

said Kitty was I never knew, but the fellow who named that drift after her evidently didn't think much of the lady. She was a cross-grained, hard, unyielding Kitty, unless that seam belied her, and she damned the souls of many men who cursed and raged at her with an unreasoning fury. I believe the seam is still going, and, if so, I trust Kitty is more esteemed than she was—though I have my doubts.

So in Kitty's Drift I spent my days. Body bent double, fully clothed in shoes and stockings; coal-black, sweat-caked body, a huddled up human machine driving the pick, a squirming contortionist wielding the shovel in heat, dust, and gloom. The half-gallon tin bottle of once cold water, now warm, served to gargle the dust out of the throat. You might even drink a little, but cautiously, for it was apt to give stomach pains if taken too liberally. Better pour it on the wrists, for that is a less risky tonic. So it went on hour after hour until the shift was ended. Then back to the two rooms next to the old school, a pot pie, a bath, and, when I wasn't rushing to a meeting, a chair and a book by the fire.

Boy Willie, now become Will, a youth of eighteen, had been working four years—for boys could not now learn work before fourteen years. He was tall, fair, and had hair of gold; straight as a pole, for the pit had not got him soon enough to bend him. A real summer of youth, the sunlight was ever on him. Intelligent, eager, modest, generous. As a putter he made money, and would have given me every penny of his small savings, but it would have been weakness to take any, and he understood. So he laughed, and called it the old mother within. As for that contradictions, stubborn, self-willed mother, Will could twist her round his finger. For us, even as men, the old gets assertiveness, but she bent to him. The youngest is always in danger of being spoiled, and mother did her best, but she couldn't spoil Will. In dress and appearance he was a direct contrast to all of us, for he made the most of his good figure. The warmth of affection had nurtured

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the seeds of laughter within him, but the steel of strong principle was there too. It was good to have him about you, and he and I became as two parts of the same whole. My books were his, and I felt the groping years had not been wasted when I could guide him along firm, known roads, instead of wandering far round and getting bogged in the fields of knowledge as I had often done. His mind was like his clean hard body, virile and tireless. I tell it with pride that from boyhood I had shaped and moulded his mind, and no artist ever got greater satisfaction out of his work than I did in the shaping and moulding of the mind of my brother Will. In that sense he was mine, although in spirit we were of equal years. One day we would work together in the mine, but also he would one day take the road I had taken to the wonderful City of Towers and Spires and skilled teacher where pit-pulleys and endless streets of barracks were unknown.

But meantime many hands reached out to pull me away from the quiet of home and leisure after the day's work.

It was early in 1904 when the men in the group of **collieries** in the Harton Coal Company invited me to run as candidate for the County Council, which was a sure seat in view of the unanimous invitation and the fact that the miners' were the dominant vote. But it was legally impossible, for my name was not on the list of voters, so I could not accept the invitation. Indeed, I was nearly thirty years old before I ever cast a vote, so complex and peculiar was the electoral law at that time. But I was now delegate to the Miners' Council at Durham, a member of my Lodge Committee doing regular work of negotiation, speaking all over the county for the I.L.P., and engaged in many other activities.

These were in addition to my work as a coal-hewer. Then one day Pete Curran, who had won Jarrow for Labour in 1907, came to see me, and requested me to act as his agent in the Jarrow Division. I was ignorant about

electoral law, and knew little of the technique of organisation, but as he pressed hard, I agreed to undertake the job. There was no pay, no expenses, and plenty of work. But divisions could never be run in this way. Hard as I worked, there was never really much of an organisation, and the hold upon the seat was precarious. It might be rather heroic for the agent to be taking a short cut across fields about midnight when he had to go down the pit at four in the morning, but he wasn't aware of it. What he was certain of was that as far as keeping the seat was concerned it couldn't be done. Such work is a science in itself, demanding time, money, and a fresh body and brain. Still, in the spirit of the time we gave our best and lived by faith. It was a great cause, and we worshipped grim old fighting Pete, known throughout the Labour movement for his capacity to slog with either words or fists. He was one of the real old pioneers, and had fought elections when to get a few hundred votes was as good as a victory for Labour.

I shall never forget the first General Election in January of 1910—for there were two that year. It was a day of sleet. From early morning until night it came down like thin cutting sheets of ice. Traffic was impossible. Telegraph wire were down—indeed, it was like the world's last day. Pete had been very ill during the whole six weeks of the Election—for they were very long elections then. Everyone but the candidate himself knew he was dying, yet he wanted to go out. Dr. Franks—now Medical Officer of Health for County Durham—ordered him to stay in bed.

Will Thorne, M.P., Will Sherwood, the well-known trade union organiser, and myself went out in a cab to go round the division. How we got up that road from Tyne Dock to East Boldon I cannot yet understand, for there were times when the horse was stopped by sheer force of the wind and driving sleet. At Boldon Colliery, men were in the shafts of a pony trap dragging old people to the poll. One of those men is now an Inspector of Educa-

tion, John Gascoigne, and another is a lecturer in Leeds University—Will Bell. There were few motor cars at that time, but the few that the other parties had brought out were soon rendered useless, and we saw a number abandoned by the roadside. Constantly we had to leave the cab and pull telegraph wires off the road. That driver was a good candidate for the North Pole adventure. When we got back to Jarrow we learned to our dismay and alarm that Pete Curran had secured a cab for a tour of the division.

He returned about eight o'clock at night frozen stiff and unconscious. It took a long time to restore circulation as he lay before the fire. It was a mad act, if courageous, but any chance of life he had was gone. He lost the Election by less than a hundred, and he died within a week. We had been limited to six hundred pounds for the night; Pete insisted that I should not "spoil the ship for a pennyworth of tar," and that I was not to worry about the limit, as he would see to that. We exceeded the limit by eighty-three pounds, but as Pete was dead his Union insisted on the limit. Result, I was handed a writ for eighty-three pounds. I told those concerned they could have my two picks. I still have that writ.

CHAPTER XVIII

Chester-le-Street

DURING THE ELECTION OF DECEMBER 1910 I WAS REPEATEDLY urged by friends in the Chester-le-Street part of the coalfield to apply for a vacant post as checkweighman at Alma Colliery. I didn't know where it was, and had not the faintest knowledge of the district. In an election, an agent can neither trouble with other things nor be troubled. Repeated invitations by letter were finally

followed by a visit from one of the men working at the colliery. He was an old school-mate whom I had not seen for years. He assured me of election if I would stand. A checkweighman is elected by individual ballot of all the hewers, who also pay him. He is their legal representative on the surface, and checks the amount of coal the hewers send to the surface. I was not only assured of election, but also that I would be given support and opportunity for useful public work. My visitor seemed certain of all that. But I wanted to earn my living with my two hands, and use my leisure time as I liked afterwards. And I held, and still hold, that the man who takes his shirt off, sweats and strains in the bowels of the earth to give warmth and comfort to millions, who exercises craft and skill and endurance to win that which is to drive engine, factory, mill, and ship—I held that all the bent-bodied, calloused-hands toilers were the salt of the earth. I was proud to be of them, and meant to remain of them, laughing at the world's accepted standards of values, which were upside down.

But let it be clearly understood there was hardly any such thing as unemployment among miners in those days. There was a sense of security as far as work was concerned that does not hold now. Although there was neither Unemployment Benefit nor Health Insurance, still there was work, and that means much even to black philosophers in short coarse flannel pants.

It may also be true that I was really shying at the enslavement which I instinctively felt public life involved. Anyhow, I was "set in my ways," as the old folks of the North say. But my visitor was "set in his ways" too, and argued that I could do all I wanted better if I were free from the pit and given wider scope. I would still be a miner, yet free to speak and work for the things I desired. I agreed to accept nomination.

Then I turned to the Election in which I was so involved that the prospective post almost faded from my

mand. The consolation of losing the Election was a telegram at the end of it informing me I had been elected to the new post. But where was the colliery, and what kind of people were my employers? I went to meet them in the Lodge Meeting. They had elected me almost unanimously in the ballot, and were very kind. So my hewing days came to an end, and I left the colliery where twenty years of my life had been spent, to which I had gone as a funny little half-starved ragamuffin, and where I had fought, sweated, studied, and striven, trying to understand the ways of the pit and of the great world around me.

Little did I think that in all that labour of body and mind, in all that driving work, I was being prepared for responsible tasks, or that the dream was now to be wrought out amidst the cold hard facts of the business side of the industry—which would leave little time for dreams. Still less did I think that when I left the great busy collieries of the east to go to the more remote north-west of Durham that I was really taking the highway which was to lead to Parliament. It is true, as Henley said, that we can be captains of our souls, and masters of our fate, but it is equally true that "There is a divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we may." And not the least part of that divinity which shaped my ends was the exceeding fineness and kindness of a host of men and women whom I met on the road from childhood to manhood. There are those who are ever saying; "Human nature being what it is," as though human nature was very sordid and suspect. It is true there are sordid, selfish, mean people in the world, but human nature generally has been, in my experience, compellingly kind, and oft-times noble. And I owe more to the great heritage which such men and women have left and to those whom I met than I will ever be able to repay.

Life and work were so different in the new part to which I moved that it might almost have been another

part of the country and another industry. Pits were more numerous, and set amidst rural scenes. They were far from the towns. Instead of one great colliery swallowing one up, there were numerous small communities where life was more intimate. Even the manager knew everybody in the pit, and in many cases had known father and grandfather before them. It was no uncommon thing, when I later began to visit colliery offices as the executive member of the Miners' Association, to hear the workers' colliery representative and the company's chief agent address each other familiarly by their Christian names. They had gone to school and grown up together. Such a thing was impossible where I had come from. Here generation had followed generation in the same pit and village, so that it was said they bred their own. The result of this long-settled communal life was a somewhat different type of man from that I had known in the huge bustling, continually changing community where I had spent my years. But, though I was a stranger, the people were very kind, and sought in every way to make me at home.

I soon discovered that my work as a check-weighman was a mere detail and by no means my real work. I was their business man, watching closely and attending to every detail affecting their wages and conditions. I was adviser on domestic questions, lawyer, and executor. So are all checkweighmen. Pit-craft first, spokesman in the office, much-tested guide in meetings, but above all of the colliery. And when you are only young, it is embarrassing when you are asked to give advice on intimate matters to old and experienced ones who are wiser than you, yet too modest to know it. But all this made me stand more on my own legs mentally. When family and community counted your words of value, you had to weigh your words, and think ahead.

By far the greatest difference in the new life lay in the open country, which could be seen far off wherever one turned. Instead of a great colliery bounding one in

with its endless colourless streets there was colour and country everywhere. Pit-pulleys were everywhere, but the landscape dominated them, and, when one of the old pits had ended its days, Nature overran it, so that you had to go right up to it before you knew it had ever belched coal. Once more I could see the changing colours of field and wood as I went to my work or looked through the window at home. I could roam the fells and for a time feel free. Or, with a book in hand, lie on the Heugh Tops (Yew) near where I now live, looking down on the narrow deep gorge which we call the Bottoms.

In the summer there are well-stocked gardens, velvety green patches of grass, and dappled cows grazing, an old mill and a glistening burn that twists and twines until it opens out to wider stretches of fields. And beyond the gorge there is the wonder-coloured chequer-board of green and gold, of grass and wheat, with patches of helio beather. To lie once more under the blue sky flecked with wind-driven clouds, or wander through woods where the gently swaying trees, like shuttles, wove wondrous garments in light and shadow—this was life; like the unfolding of leaves in spring.

But if there was poetry there was also grim, solemn fact too. Just over there stands a mine where a couple of years before my coming to the district an explosion rocked the homes of nearly two hundred men and boys who were caught in the holocaust of flame which shrivelled everything before it. In one street every house had at least one dead. And many other mines around had their tale of explosions. It is a sad thing to say that these are only a small portion of the annual toll of deaths in the mine. The explosion startles, and public sympathy is rightly stirred because of the many in one mine who have been suddenly swept away. But it is the daily toll of single lives lost that goes to make the greater part of the annual twelve hundred fatalities. Most of these are only ~~heard of~~ in the colliery concerned, and are noted

annually in the statistics of the Mines Department. Silent and ceaseless, the fatal accident is a solemn thing to those who know the man or boy, and the home to which that tragedy comes. When you have had to break the news to mother or wife, and have helped to carry the poor broken body in, then you know the tragedies behind the statistics, and the daily drama of broken hearts and lives behind those figures. Such has been too often my experience in common with many in the mining world of Great Britain. When it is said, as it often is in other circles, that we miners have minds peculiarly rooted in our life and conditioned by it, then let the life and toll of our trade speak for us. But, anyhow, it is a well-disposed mind and wide open with charity. Perhaps our trade has not a little to do with that, for it early teaches us to know the need of these things.

CHAPTER XIX

The Minimum Wage

MINERS LIVE A VERY COMMUNAL LIFE. ALL LIVE IN THE same colliery village, and all work at the same colliery; when not at work they are always "at home" to one another. The doors are always open. Therefore they know each other intimately.

In common with all, I had enjoyed the common right of the social call and pleasant hour. But now my work brought me a closer knowledge of home conditions and difficulties—especially difficulties. Limited space and bad sanitation have a deleterious effect on income, health, education and morality. We miners did what we could to meet the need with the means at our disposal. But the remedy lay deeper. More houses, better houses.

More education, better education. And better incomes. The moral was plain: the worker must do these things for himself. The old dream was re-inforced by daily experience so intimate and urgent that it left no time for dreaming. I didn't "go into public life," and I didn't want "public life." No one ever wanted a work-and-home-life more than I. But facts drove me to action. Behind action was the sense of wrong that those who by their work and life deserved the best got the worst returns. So I urged the workers to better things themselves. On foot and cycle I went to meetings. I preached no abstract economic theory—not even that of Marx. I knew the problem better than any theorist, and had plenty of material at hand from day-to-day experience to point the moral. Wherever two or three could be gathered together in any part of the county I went. And so did the other members of our small band. Trains were rarely used, for they would seldom serve the purpose; and anyhow there was little money for them. The bus was not yet. It was often midnight or early morning when I returned. If there were only a handful at the meetings, there was the reward of fellowship and the knowledge that a little seed had been sown. But sometimes we got crowds and some fun.

I remember one night when a fine meeting was followed by supper with friends. Result—midnight, lost in the dark, up a signpost trying to spell out with my fingers the directions in raised letters. That was my first lesson in Braille—and last.

In the matter of Labour representation the district where I now lived was ahead of the rest of Durham, for there were a few workers' representatives on the County Council; and Chester-le-Street Division had been held by Labour for some five years. In a year or two the County Council elections came round. The miners nominated me, and elected me by a good majority, and raised the number of workers' representatives to ten in a Council of twenty-nine.

It was thus that I was pulled into the mill-stream of affairs, and got less leisure than ever. I was also in the thick of the fight for a minimum wage for miners. The need was very great, for I knew good men who sometimes got less than a pound for a week of coal-hewing. I wrote a pamphlet, and came into conflict with one of the older miners' officials who didn't believe in it, but I got cheered by conferences and great crowds—who agreed with me but did not believe we would ever get a minimum wage. Insecurity had always been a fundamental part of their lives; it was part of the order of things; had always been so, and was therefore divinely ordained. The clergy and lawyers had a minimum wage, as Ruskin had pointed out half a century before. But the pit and pitmen belonged to another world. Still, the right to a minimum wage was plain, so plain that it grew from an abstract theory into a passionate demand. A crisis came, and the Government of the day was faced with a first-class political issue. A great strike took place at the mines. It was in the summer of 1912, and got it as was the tragedy of the cessation of work and the cessation of wages, it was relieved by organised amusements. Walking matches, and all kinds of games and sports, were organised all over the county. As the ponies were brought out of the pit, children, mothers, and boys went to see them. Everybody knew the names, but they now saw "Billy" or "Boxer" for the first time. One would almost think the ponies belonged to the family. Some of these ponies had been down the pit for years, so that they almost staggered before the light, and hardly knew what the green of the fields was. After a time their drivers rode them in races organised by the manager, officials, and men's leaders. There are few Derby's more exciting than a pit-pony Derby during a strike.

The small Labour group in the House of Commons had got a Bill through Parliament to feed necessitous school-children. We applied it; teachers and workers gave their services freely for cooking, preparing tables, and

serving. So at least the children were looked after. What a change from the day when the master called me to his desk about that breakfast in his house. But strikes are strikes, and mean suffering. I was under no illusion. But if the worker is almost voiceless in the affairs of the nation, as he was then, and with no security for his wages then what could he do? Anyhow, he secured his minimum wage, and won one of the most concrete advantages in industrial history. Bad as things are to day, those who worked under the old tooth and claw system know the boon the minimum wage has proved. So far off did that idea seem in the light of conditions that had prevailed that men had thought it a dream. But dreams sometimes come true. Finality has not been reached, for the minimum wage needs to be carried further in the light of present-day conditions.

And now brother Will was a man, and had been a year in Oxford. Tall and good looking, he came to see me in the autumn. G. D. H. Cole and R. H. Tawney—two young Fellows of the University—were making a breach in its conservatism, and had a good following among undergraduates. Will was at Ruskin College, and went to the lectures of the heterodox Fellows. He was preparing for the University Economic and Political Science Diploma.

Will won his diploma the next year, and returned to the pit, where he worked as a coal-hewer. During that time I had been elected to the Miners' Executive and Conciliation Boards. So, what with my pit work and County Council Arbitrations for the men at collieries up and down the County, Executive and Conciliation Boards, and delegations to London and abroad, I was a real man of affairs. But now and then I got time to total up the worth of it all, or, as my father would say, to take the soundings and read the compass so that I should know if the ship of my dreams was sailing true to direction. The winter gave me time for this, for the meetings were few then, as we mainly relied on open-air meetings. Then

would I take two little girls on my knee before the bright fire, while their mother made dresses or knitted stockings. And the sewing and knitting, or baking, were often held up when excitement grew about the long journeys we took to far-away beautiful lands on the back of a great flying stork. There were amazing adventures in that wonderland. Of course, Lewis Carroll had done it all long before when he told a certain little girl all about Alice in Wonderland, while they floated down the river on a summer's day. So I read my little girls the story sometimes, and, when they nodded, helped to carry them to bed. Then one could look at life and affairs from the proper angle, for was not all our work to this end—that little children should live in their Wonderland, and mothers and fathers be heartful of the good of life because they were. The wind came singing its way over the fells and whistling at the window. From where I sat I could see the lights of a village twinkle like a silver rim to the deep dark void. Over there were homes and fathers and mothers and little children. Was it with them as it was with us? Had I earned what was mine, which was nothing but joy and laughter—which is life's best pay? Had I done what I might, and, if not, wherein had I erred? Then suddenly I knew the searching and questioning was as one praying, and that at least if I had neither been satisfied nor succeeded, the desire and dream were still there.

CHAPTER XX

The Big Meeting

THE BIG MEETING IS ALMOST AS MUCH A PART OF OUR mining life as the Cathedral is of Durham city. Like every other miner, I early found my way to the annual

demonstration, and went regularly for many years. In time I went with my Lodge with band and banner, and a good following of members and their wives. I still go every year, for it is to me one of the most impressive and inspiring experiences any man can have. It is exhilarating to march with your band and banner, and also to watch this stirring spectacle from some high point of vantage, where you see it as a long continuous whole. Officially this gathering is called a gala, but to the miners and their wives, who come in from every part of Durham, it is "The Big Meeting."

Banner after banner, band after band, followed by the members of the Lodges and their wives. From remote places on moor and fell, and from huge collieries near the towns, they have marched; down from the boundaries of the coalfield, and up from the centre they have come keeping step all along the roads to lively tunes. Since eight in the morning they have been coming into the city of Durham, and even at noon the apparently endless march goes on.

First comes the great banner carried by picked men, who must know how to carry themselves, or their strength will avail them little. Poising the poles in the brass cup resting on the chest, and held by leather straps on the shoulders, is a great art.

The colliery banner is almost a personality. Much thought has been given to colour, design, and size. Many have been the consultations with the artist and the firm chosen to carry out the wishes of the Lodge in the matter of bringing this banner to life, and one of the great days in the history of the colliery was the unveiling of it. A colliery without a banner is almost unthinkable. Deep debate on design and finance go to the making of it, and he is an honoured man who is chosen to cut the silken cord and speak to the great crowd which gathers at its unfurling. No regimental flag is dearer to the soldier than that emblem, showing the Good Samaritan tending the stricken wayfarer, in a setting of red, blue, and gold, is

to the miner. The officials of the Lodge walk with pride beneath their banner, while behind comes the band and the men and women of the colliery. Down the main street they walk, between walls of spectators massed together on either side. Greetings are called by the on-lookers to friends and relatives in the procession, and hands are gripped as they pass on. Sometimes the march is slowed down; sometimes it is stopped, marchers and spectators blocking the long street as far as eye can see.

Above the fluttering banners, the old square Castle, on its foundation of rock, rises clear cut against the sky, seeming to block further passage that way. But the procession moves on, and as it passes slowly over the bridge one can see the tree shadows like etched pictures in the seemingly still waters of the river below. Gradually the marchers wedge themselves into the narrow street which is called Silver, and past the mighty squat Cathedral, "Half church of God, half castle 'gainst the Scot," standing there so grey and quiet in its own grounds. Turning and twisting round narrow hairpin bends, the procession sweeps into the broad street that leads past the handsome red Shire Hall and the great gloomy prison, until it finally reaches the wide, spacious racecourse by which the River Wear runs. Whether the street be wide or narrow, it is a packed mass of cheering crowds and friends saluting friends. A happy, gay crowd, which has thrown off old care for this one day. Ranged side by side all along the river, banners are fixed, fluttering in the breeze. Many are covered with crape in token of a fellow-member of the Lodge killed in the mine that year. Following the course of the river, the banners form a semicircle, impressive and beautiful. To the left, the square grey towers of the Cathedral rise on the heights. The Castle is farther over. Standing there, representing the power of old times, one would not be surprised to see armoured knights step out and challenge the crowds below. The centuries look down on a sight which stirs the blood, for the proud pennants of

marauding barons, in all their colour and bravery, have passed into the hands of the serfs who were then little more than cattle, and have now become men and women.

It is a sight which compels the vision and the question, What has given birth to this thing? What is it that has brought together these hundreds of thousands of people, dominated by a communal spirit more eloquent than the greatest speech? Year by year, for half a century they have been coming now, taking such complete possession of the city that no traffic can come within it that day.

When the Big Meeting first began, the citizens of Durham feared these hordes of miners, of whose fierceness terrible tales were told. The citizens protested against this invasion of miners, and, when they found themselves powerless to stop the invasion, barricaded their premises and filled the city as a place accursed. But the pariahs from the coalfields had come, and their splendid self-discipline left such an impression that the "protestors" had finally felt very foolish. Now the business people cheer the marchers, and, indeed, annually request those in authority to grant special privileges to the "invaders."

But there is a greater story to be told of this people and their forbears. It would take long to tell the tale of that mass of human beings, driven from all the points of the compass into his coalfield by the fierce winds of the Industrial Revolution; men from all counties and all parts of the kingdom, working and fighting together—and in times of stress sharing even their last crust with each other. Thrown on their own resources and left to work out their own salvation, they had to journey through the social wilderness, until now they are one and indivisible, toiling, rejoicing and suffering together; and suffering has played a great part in the process.

Take your stand in any place in that coalfield and you will see the wheels of at least one mine which has been swept by the devilish, all-devouring blast that has carried men and horses before it, and then sent back its poison to

suffocate those it had missed in its course. But what are fire and flood compared with the daily toll over the greater part of two centuries ; the sudden silence in the mine and the mournful groups with the still body on the rough ambulance ? These things have brought suffering and broken hearts, but they have welded these people into a unity which is more than economic. They have brought an instinctive understanding to all miners and all workers in all lands, and created a sense of solidarity which no amount of education could have given by itself.

* * * * *

The union has brought this great crowd here for the "Big Meeting," but the gala spirit is dominant everywhere. Families sit on the grass all over the course, sampling the good things baked by mother and daughter ; and nothing tastes so good to these women as the compliments paid to their baking.

Some wander round, meeting old friends who have moved to other collieries, and, alas ! old Adam is here too, for there are those who go to the gambling school, or play "banker" on the grass.

Two platforms are erected on the ground some distance from one another, and around the platforms are gathered some thousands of men and women. Most stand, but many are seated on the grass and a few on the steps of the platform.

The time for the meeting is not yet due, but a self-elected chairman keeps order at each platform in a lively debate, which he himself has initiated while awaiting the coming speakers.

It is a good-humoured and a serious crowd which is gathered round the platforms. But here too the gala spirit is abroad, for this is the day of days to them ; a feast of good things is to come, and anticipation is the keynote of the assemblies. The same gala spirit animates the

crowd, that has adjourned to the various forms of sport. The same spirit is manifest among all the thousands scattered over the course eating and gossiping. Wherever they are, whatever they are doing, the gala spirit manifests itself. It is the day of the year, and old Durham is theirs. For over fifty years they have marched through the city once a year. Their fathers had done it before them. From boyhood and girlhood they had heard this day spoken of in the home as though it was a sacred day - withal a day of rejoicing - and this city is their Mecca. The remnant had gathered here in the old hard days when the union struggled for existence, and its scattered members found comfort in meeting together. Now it is the indifferent and negligible remnant that is left at home and all the county community is here, not hanging together in their weakness, but mighty, sure, and dominant. The days of uncertain, dependent childhood are past, and this is the strong man with experience won, reflecting on the best way to use his strength.

A cheer goes up as a group is seen pushing its way to the platforms. Eager enthusiasts try to shake hands with the speakers who have been selected by the vote of the **Miners' Lodges**. Great has been the interest taken in that vote, and not a little manoeuvring between the various schools of thought to get the man who would most accurately voice their views.

The Secretary of the union is in charge of one platform and the President at the other. They are products of the grim era of individualism, and they carry its marks upon them physically and mentally, though they are both declared Socialists. Both are over six feet, magnificent specimens, straight as pines, even though they are old and grey. They tower above the crowds, even as they have towered over the grim circumstances of the period in which they laboured as miners. They are pitmen to the core, yet cultured men. They are poor men, but rich in experience. With blood and sinew and splendid self-sacrificing service they have won a trust and loyalty from the

men around them that vast wealth could not buy. The president, forceful, dominant, self-reliant, handles the crowd as only a man can who has had to fight crowds with his back to the wall, sway them with human appeal, or reason closely, as circumstances demanded. He did not arrive by saying what men wanted him to say; he arrived by saying what he believed he ought to say in the best interests of those he served.

The secretary reminds one of the busts of Shakespeare—the shape of his face, and his great fine eyes. He appeals, but there is ever the challenge behind the appeal. He makes up his mind—and he is granite; a local preacher, cultured, widely travelled, deeply versed in the technique of his own trade and equally in that of local government.

The thickset, business-like treasurer reads the annual balance sheet as a preliminary to the meeting, and a well-dressed, cultured-looking financial secretary does the like on another. In their own respective ways they make that balance sheet a very human thing. For, though it is the business account of a great business concern, it also touches the lives of a great mass of people. The critic of democracy, or of trade unions, might well ponder that trade account of how humble men have organised, contributed their coppers weekly, and in a businesslike way helped to sustain the unfortunate, and conduct as well as defend their own trade interests. The integrity, ability, and self-sacrificing loyalty behind that document is further revealed when an athletic, bronzed little man tells of the work done for the injured and relatives of those who have been killed. For, though we may win mining regulations, and an infinity of safety regulations, and though the miner pays his own selected inspectors to fortify the work of Government inspectors, the banners around show the annual toll is still paid. So if an accident cannot be prevented, the sufferer and his dependants can at least have the service and experience of a skilled legal department which defends and gives a full account of its work.

Cook, the secretary of the Miners' Federation, coast off,

a bundle of energy in spite of his one leg, galvanises his audience. But he is also wearing himself out, and will soon be at peace for ever. Ellen Wilkinson, small, young, sure, easily reaches the extreme edges of the vast crowds with her voice—which power is not given to many speakers. She captures by her unexpectedness, and holds by fact upon fact. Bevin, far from massive in conception, but clear and simple in his reasoning, penetrating, business like, independent in outlook, reaching the young reading worker and living pride to the old.

And finally George Lansbury. Old in the workers' cause, yet as young as the youngest in outlook and enthusiasm, the unsuspected practical man in conference, but the friar of the Socialist movement on the platform. His name is a banner, and his simplest sentence a message.

No commonplace platforms these, no commonplace crowd. Each reacts upon the other, so that the exhilaration of mind and spirit lifts them to unusual heights of thought and vision. And over all the blue sky and the hot sun, tempered by the light breeze which gently moves the bright-coloured banners. The river rolls clear and cool, and away beyond are wide stretches of deep green fields and dark thick woods.

With the end of the meeting, large numbers move towards the Cathedral. For there a service is to be held and collections taken in aid of the Aged Miners' Homes. The miner is proud of his "Homes" movement, for it is his, and he gives his aged people a beautiful home. To-day he will go to the Cathedral for this purpose. But he will go for more than that, for he is very reverent, and loves a good service and a good sermon.

Three miners' bands have the honour of being selected to lead the singing in that wonderful building, packed with people, mostly men, whose strong voices roll through the place like some huge organ.

Moore Ede, Dean of Worcester—one of the founders

and ex-treasurer of the Aged Miners' Homes—is the preacher. The winter of life has laid its white snows upon him, but there is no winter in his heart. A kindly, gentle, strong face, through which faith shines, revealing the spirit of him. A beautiful, invisible mantle wrought by prayer and reflection clothes him, and, though you cannot touch it, the thing itself is seen and known to all. This man has a firm hold on the affections of the congregation whose lives have been moulded and beaten to shape by grim toil. The psalms they sing are real and searching, and the chapter he reads, with its message of love, seems an easy, attainable wisdom in his presence.

As he speaks from the pulpit that day, he speaks with the authority those men and women have given him. The devout and the indifferent are there—even the roysterer is present; and they are as clay in the hands of the old potter, who, in that hour, works and shapes beauty out of the rough mixed material. Wise things are said in simple words, but the spirit of him holds more wisdom than the spoken words and ideas expressed.

His audience has been disciplined by toil, made familiar with danger and death, and is worried much by material things. Their lot is cast in an age of coal, iron, and steel, and necessity compels deep, grim thoughts on things economic.

Many of those men sitting there are students of their own local industrial history, and at times they will tell you of the strike in the early nineteenth-century when the prison was so full of those engaged in the conflict that the bishop's stables were used as a prison. They are proud of those prisoners; their thought is coloured by such incidents, and their pride in such forebears has gone to make those stiff, unshakable convictions which at times leads the critic to count them narrow. But one can afford a breadth of judgment in the library that would be an insult to reason in the pit. The pick and the sparse pay-note allow little room for philosophic "breadth."

But in spite of such knowledge and experience this audience listens now with its heart. Time, epochs, and economics are forgotten for they seek what the soul of man has sought in all ages and all lands, and always will seek—that which satisfies the spirit. Thus they are held by the strong, eloquent voice of the preacher, to whom they listen like still eager children to a well told story.

And I, too, was in that congregation listening to my old friend whom I had met under such strange circumstances a few years before, and who understood me almost before I understood myself. Tired by the marching and moving in close packed crowds it was good to find oneself in this place, so cool and restful. The detachment from the rush and wrestle of the week's work and release from the bustle of things outside all combined to weave a spell around me the moment I entered the Cathedral. But while I listened to the old preacher the wonder of this building gripped me so that the everyday life seemed far away.

A thousand years it had stood like a great sentinel, high up looking silently on at the busy life below. Day by day without ceasing, it had heard the tramp of passing feet. Around it, and far beyond, it had seen generations come and go with their differing forms of social life. Yet since the days when the monkish builders—varying their toil with times of prayer—had wrought to raise this pile, it had stood unchanged. Social storm, riot, civil war, and cruel bloody battles, it had seen them all, yet ever it stood, giving silent welcome to friend and foe. Through its aisles had slowly moved, adorned in splendour, all that was representative of the wealth and power of the differing ages. Yet they had passed, and the vast Norman building with its mighty pillars stood serene, untroubled, imperishable—the refuge of all seeking peace. I also, with my fellow-workers, living in the stressful days of this industrial age, had come to find rest and solace. As a miner, Methodist, Socialist, I cared little for either its ornate or its ecclesiastical side. But I felt myself so tuned and

enlarged by this place of strength and beauty, with its setting of toilers, that I was carried in vision beyond the things of to-day. This harsh, raw industrial age would pass like the others, which had taken with them the serf and the cattle-like peasant. I looked on the faces of the men and women around me, seeing the eager light in their eyes, and the features softened by the influence of the place. I thought of their work, their courage, their love of home, and the patient sacrifice with which they were building up organisations for the winning of economic freedom ; I thought of all the way this people had come—and victory over the grim things of our life seemed certain. So it was that the preacher had finished before I knew. It was the music and the voices of the great multitude rolling through the mighty building which brought me to myself.

The service over, the people file out of the Cathedral, to join the slow-moving masses in the streets. ~~Sometimes~~ these stand there unable to move. As far as the eye can reach it is a solid mass of human beings, who stand exchanging views and jokes, some playing pranks upon those nearest—that is, when they can move. Then, just when someone has asserted laughingly that " We are gannin to be here all neet," the dam is removed, and the great human river moves on. Bands and banners are coming, and, with their characteristic instinct for order, way is made for the advancing Lodge, which marches easily where further movement just now seemed impossible. So the return to the collieries goes on with flying colours and lively music, while the rest of the great mining family, orderly, good-humoured, gossips, argues, fraternises, and sweethearts.

CHAPTER XXI

The Magic Carpet

IN THE CHILDHOOD OF THE WORLD MANY TALES WERE told for the delight of the children. One of these tales was about a magic carpet on which, when you sat thereon, you were whirled through the air in ecstasy, beholding wondrous things in wondrous lands. I was in my thirties before the thrill of the magic carpet was mine. My carpet took me over the sea to the Hook of Holland, on and on through new lands, until I was tumbled off the carpet at Leipzig. Leipzig! Birthplace of Wagner. Grave of Napoleon's ambitions—at least the place where the first sods of the grave were dug. Then Dresden, place of wonderful china which did not matter to me—I mean the china—as I was a devotee of the pitman's punt pot, thick and heavy, holding hot brown tea. But there too, in Dresden, was a wonderful Art Gallery, where I saw the Madonna of Raphael, and, what to me was more impressive, the picture of two men carrying into a poor home the body of a man, while the wife, broken by the blow, leaned her head on her arms over a table. There was the hopelessness of the lost in the drooping of those shoulders. The woman's old mother looked at her, but even the wisdom of age was baffled and helpless. The name of the picture I know not, nor the painter—though I know he was Dutch, but I remember that picture better than the great Raphael. Perhaps it was because it spoke eloquently of what I had often seen.

I also saw the goose-stepping soldiers, precise, machine-like, being perfected for the war a year hence, which would droop the shoulders and stamp hopelessness and despair on the faces of millions of mothers.

But meanwhile the magic carpet took me to Carlsbad, in Bohemia, now called Czecho-Slovakia. Carlsbad, famed

for its healing waters---for those who had wealth. Everybody who was anybody in Europe went there to drink its nasty waters. They thought it did them good; probably the thought was as stimulating as the waters.

Here pitman Lawson landed in the middle of 1913. Why shouldn't he? The right to do so was bought with a good slice of gloomy subterranean life, and few there could show as good a right. The Miners' International should have been held in Vienna, but for some vague reason that city was declared by the Government out of bounds to Miners' Congresses.

The Balkans were alive. One morning there was great commotion in our hotel. The landlady rushed in shouting, throwing her arms about, and generally giving the impression that her reason had altogether departed. Then she rushed out. Later we met her smiling and courteous, altogether the real hydro hostess. On enquiries as to the commotion, she explained in broken English that it had been reported that Serbian soldiers had entered a certain village. Well, we didn't care if they had entered two. But, not being experts on such matters as Bosnia and Herzegovina, we were not aware that if this report had been true, and Serbian soldiers had raided Austrian territory, the spark would have fired the Balkan magazine. All this was explained to us as we listened seriously, keeping jokes about it until later. Funny people, these. The Balkans! What were they, anyhow? And even now, after a world-shaking experience, I ask the same question. Of course the learned in the diplomatic lore of the Near East would answer easily. I am not learned, though I know a little about it. But, when all is said, the question still stands. What are the Balkans, that millions of the world's youth should die over them?

Thus it happened that in Carlsbad in 1913 miners of many nations assembled to hold conference on matters affecting their common life. I learned while there that

workers are workers in all lands—just the same wherever they live, whatever their language. That is especially the case with miners. The pit speaks in the same language to us all the language of toil, discipline, and danger. We spoke of these experiences, compared aspirations, passed resolutions, considered ways and means for common action. How strong the bond between us!

On a memorable day we went out to a beautiful little village for a few social hours together. In a great fragrant garden, with the gold of the sun upon it, we made short fraternal speeches while stiff, stolid gendarmes with bristling moustaches, took notes of all that was said. It was as if a big moustached sergeant of the Guards, transferred to Scotland Yard was taking shorthand notes at a Sunday-school tea-party. We spoke kindly words to each other in our respective tongues which our Adolph Smith translated. Then we sang "You'll take the high road, and I'll take the low", "John Peel"; German songs; Austria—which we knew as a hymn, the "Marseillaise." We hummed the tunes when we didn't know the words. We sang the words of the same tune in different languages. We sang our National Anthems all together for they were all ours and we were one. Finally, we linked hands and sang "Auld Lang Syne." Everybody seemed to know that, for it carried the aspirations of fellowship and friendship for ever in its half-sad, melting tones. Language, lands, races, did not exist. We were one family, held together by the common bond of a common experience.

The cynic smiles at such scenes in view of what happened in the years following. But the cynic is never deep. For, in spite of what happened, the bond between the workers of the nations is not only real, but unbreakable. Unless that fact is grasped by the governors of the world, and its destinies shaped accordingly, disaster will come to what is termed this civilisation. Those common people with linked hands, if wisely led by lovers of

peace, will storm the ramparts of heaven, seeking peace, but if modern war is the condition of existence, they will send this structure of society crashing down to hell.

That was an old, compact little world in which I found myself, a world in which crowns were revered, and the families of Court persons, and their little world, were held in awe. The awe has gone. War rubbed the tinsel off. Another war; and the glitter will go from many things that look like gold. The danger is lest the real gold of our social structure may go with it. On that magic-carpet journey I saw a new world. Not merely cities and lands, with their treasures of art and story—these were thrillingly new—but a world where people lived in obviously staggering material opulence, detached, as though my world was not. I didn't like that world, and, by the look on their faces, its inhabitants did not seem to get much out of it. I was shocked, but when I told my friends at the pit about what I had seen they did not growl like sullen beasts, as novelists describe. After my journey on my magic carpet I returned to the mine.

My wage conditions were exactly the same as those of the coal-hewers whose coal I weighed. I was, however, freed from the physical stress, darkness, damp, heat, and risk, but I had to be on the alert and forward-looking in respect to the conditions of men and boys, and at the beck and call of all who came for guidance on the street or at home. I found good fellowship all round. Confined there was at times, but that is stimulating if the spirit of goodwill is present. Sometimes I went down the pit to help clear up some working difficulty, or as the men's inspector under the Act. Relations with the management were good, for, though I fought for the last fraction in wages and conditions—and those who worked at the colliery will speak as to results—I was not fool enough to think the great change I ardently worked for could be achieved through one colliery office.

We got what we could. We were solid, experienced, and of good cheer, and we neither overlooked a point in the game nor gave the impression that goodwill meant weakness. Rather was it the other way about. This of course, is no unusual thing in Northern union affairs, and I am only too well aware it was more simple in the days when coal was king than it is to-day when the king has been dethroned by other rivals named oil and electricity. But for all that there was great strength in our fellowship and everywhere I found friends. Meetings—indoor and outdoor; Labour meetings, lectures, sermons. Whether it was sermon or speech over the same message, the burden of which I have given in previous chapters. In the homes and characters I came to know there was reward beyond money. Students, who had that rare wisdom which often comes where the hands are hard and toil. Strong, modest, gentle men, refined in the furnace of experience, who would handle the hardly earned books—not always deferring to the opinions set forth, even though the newest school of thought in Cambridge or London had endorsed it. The supreme mistress of the craft, which can make a colliery house a thing of beauty to remember—she casting the light of her countenance over the supper-table, seeing to it that the philosophers did not overlook the apple pie. Hosts serious, hosts humorous, all clear-cut characters, giving of their good things, material and spiritual, asking nothing but that life shall be good for you. This was the pay for services rendered, and good pay too. There are the other kind I know. The brutal, coarse type can be found in pit village as well as town, in a mansion as well as in a colliery house. A life in the ruck destroys any illusions on that point. But when I think of life, it is the wonder of the patient, toilsome, kindly man and woman, sometimes learned and wise, sometimes wise without being learned—it is these who hold me. And as I turned from such, to return home by fields, or road, often in the midnight hours, I asked myself if I was worthy of such friends and fellowship. For

truly a brotherhood—fellowship was life, and the lack of it death.

And that was better than wealth, or even a more carpet.

CHAPTER XXII

Union Officials

THE READER WILL HAVE GATHERED FROM PREVIOUS PAGES that the union is an integral part of the life of the Northern miner; in truth, it is in the texture of his thought even when he is not conscious of it. For wages, house conditions, safety in the mine, are all settled and **seen to by** the union. When work is to be started on a seam, prices and conditions must be decided. Roof, height, timber, wage standards must be taken into consideration, also consideration must be given to the respect of tradition, and a dozen other things. There was once a man who declared when the Cabinet was being formed that he must have the Treasury, because he had "served up to it." And if ever anyone "serves up to it" the miner's official does. He does his serving in heat and sweat, doubled up in the dark, year after year, from boyhood to manhood. He is of the pit, he is of the colliery—which is, of course, the streets and homes in which the miners live.

Add to this, the terms he uses, methods of calculation, knowledge of the men for whom he acts, knowledge of the effects of what is decided upon the homes (of which his is one). Then there is in addition the drilling criticism he must face in the business meeting of the union when terms are being discussed—add these and you still have only a faint idea of the varied work of a union official. To-day, after years of experience of the wider world, I

am more than ever astonished at the patience, ability, the qualities of judgment and foresight, and the standard of service which these men give. And they give all this labour for a pittance; therefore it cannot be said to be the wage that holds them to their task. That which draws and holds them is the respect, esteem, and standing that they have in their community. And above all the spirit of service. The union official does not escape criticism. There is abundance of that, and it is sometimes biting. But he knows other things are to be taken into account. People come to his home for advice, they meet him on the road, in the pit, at the hall of meeting everywhere, at all hours of the day; they come, and he is ever the patient listener and adviser. Now and then he speaks his mind, so does someone else. And then speech at such times is apt to be sharp, true, and often stinging. Courtesy is a good quality, but we are not ignorant of the value of a steel-like sentence or two. The union—that is the officials—keep close watch on the state of the mine. The workers appoint their own inspectors for this purpose, and also combine with men in other collieries to pay a regular contribution to maintain one of their own, with expert mining knowledge, and certificates to show that a man who can go down the pit regularly, or at special times when called upon. When necessary Government inspectors are sent for. If an accident happens, the union looks after the compensation of the unfortunate. And there are men in every northern colliery who can expound the Compensation Law like a lawyer.

When an accident is fatal, the news has to be broken in a home that is often ignorant of the dread thing that is coming.

Then the scene of accident must be examined to learn the cause, and ascertain whether there was negligence of any kind. In addition to compensation, individual contributions are made by the men and boys; thus the

dependants receive additional money, which is a help in the time of need. Some of the sick have to be sent to a convalescent home, and arrangements must be made.

There is a hospital case, and the ambulance van or some other means of transport has to be arranged. A vacancy in the Miners' Home—and so many need it. Who is to go? There's a fine point. Sometimes there is an annual treat for the old people, and something for the bairns. Every day, something, and between whiles advice to many on questions far beyond the range of the ordinary duties of the officials. Fortnightly, they collect the revenue, and, quarterly, they give an account of their stewardship.

The men pay their coppers to the union, the hospital, the Aged Miners' Homes, and many other good objects. The financial tale and the total raised is a thing to marvel at. Regularly, with never a doubt of its value, miners pay their union contributions. Some few may have to be spoken to, but even they never question its worth, for life and even death is involved in the work of the union; and they know it. With years of my life spent in the scrum of it, living now in the midst, and watching it at close quarters, I marvel at the far-sightedness, the business-like ability, the long years of patience and self-sacrifice which have gone to build up and maintain this great organisation called the union. Only the very high social sense and the sometimes instinctive, sometimes conscious, social purpose behind it could have done this thing. Human we are, and so at times human failings appear in the working of it, but even these only serve to throw the floodlight on what has been and is being accomplished. It is a great business, and yet not a business. It is for the individual, and yet it is for the community. It is very, very human, and yet in the teeth of the critical I will say it is Divine—the very essence of the Christian Gospel working out in the lives of the people, in the pit and in the home.

Ask the manager as to the value of the union. He has reserve opinions on some things, for he is held responsible for the safety of the pit, and the men have necessarily here and there to be critical. He has to consider costs, and the men have to consider wages. The two do not run easily together, so there is sharp bargaining. The manager is harried by his superiors, who are harried by competitors in markets, to ever increase production and the men who have to do the producing have their opinions too. Then there are new ideas on both sides which sometimes clash. Now and then there is a stoppage as the result. But it would be difficult to find a manager in the North who would not admit that the union is a co-operative agent without which the mine would be poorer in its organisation. Co-operation between men and employers is often talked of in vague terms, the talkers meanwhile showing their entire ignorance of the immense range of it in actual operation every working day of the year. The miner has his views of the ultimate goal at which he aims. He stands for social ownership. But he also is aware that at present, or in the future, ordered co-operative action is necessary to his own well being. And the union is a means to that end, as well as an active agent in his personal interest. It is also part of his communal life, and a very important part too.

"If war hath her victories, peace hath hers as well." True, war is more arresting to historian and reader. Some day, I doubt not, the historian will discover the humble ones of this world. He will sit in the midst of them, observing, listening, studying their ways, customs, and institutions; maybe he will *feel* with them, and lo! he will discover material for his work such as historians seldom find; his record of history will be near to drama.

Meanwhile the institutions of the colliery, the lives of the people in the commonplace rows, find little place in the nation's story. The union, of course, is a thing to ~~pass over discreetly~~. We have this in common with all other unions; we have not "arrived" yet. Sidney Webb

actually gave his mind to the task, and one or two others have done a little. The ages will be grateful for these few books depicting the life of the people, and recording the story and work of the unions. But to-day a union means to the really respectable citizen a bricklayer who won't lay bricks, a plumber who never mends a pipe, and a miner who is either striking or contemplating a strike. Sympathy for the man, of course, but the union is another thing. Sidney Webb showed that unions were the descendants of the old guilds, and therefore centuries old. He knew what counted with the respectable Englishman. Call a thing old, prove it is not new, and the sanctity of time breaks down prejudices. But the respectable Englishman won't have it. The leisurely bricklayer and plumber, and the miner who disturbs the peace, is in his mind when the question of Unions comes up. Even in the Labour and Socialist movement to-day men are heard at times speaking scornfully or in a paternal, indulgent way of Trade Unions. Strange how the really respectable bourgeois mind of the really respectable Englishman will persist and obtrude itself in quite unexpected places.

The men of the unions are a mysterious entity, because they are up against the facts; must face up and do what is possible to shape them to their own ends. Our way of life is not of the nature which inclines one to love theorists, heterodox or orthodox.

A few grains from them here and there worked into the system at the point of the pick, but no chaff, however brilliant the wordy substitute for wisdom may appear. The professors didn't catch me early enough for that, and my life didn't make me easily bendable to them. I never cared twopence what a man thought, however revolutionary, heterodox, or orthodox, as long as he did think it, instead of only thinking he thought it, under the influence of the latest champion of some "school," whose knowledge of life and mankind was exactly "nil." One thing I have learned and I'm sure of: schools, colleges,

and universities, with all their values, do not contain all the wisdom of the world, nor any great part of it, and writers of books--whose opinions are so greedily absorbed that they become almost unofficial dictators--even these may have something to learn. The logic of life driven in by hard masters, may entitle the serious worker to teach the bookish ones something for he has mentally carved his own way through. "Inferiority complex" is the latest jargon to apply when the philosophers of the superior ones are scorned. What a lot of "superiority complex" doctrines in the whole range of social thought and action one sees come and go in a lifetime! It is good that they should come, better that they should go, but best of all that the humble ones should learn that an aggressive word-wizard will often try to dominate them with inferior stuff. Let the man who works with his hands laugh at words, and one day he will teach the philosophers that their words may probably not be philosophy at all. Let him speak of life as he has learned it, form his own conclusions, and refuse to be smothered by words. The worker has a definite contribution to make to the thought and affairs of life--if it is really his own thought.

Of such thinkers there are many in industrial areas, as in mining districts. Sometimes shy, sometimes looking you over, humorous, wise, penetrating, feet planted firm, silently nodding, or hitting you hard with a pointed piece of rock-like wisdom hewn hardly out of life's quarry, face stern, then again grinning at you and your, jolts--great wise men, some of these unknown toilers in the deeps of life. Go to them, you great ones, and learn that the world of men wanders over fields of diamonds which it mistakes for pebbles.

CHAPTER XXIII

Sons Go Out

IN 1914, THE WAR CAME, ROCKING THE WORLD OF MANKIND like an earthquake, cracking its social surface, causing some of it to cave in. I will not attempt a description of the sensations, scenes, experiences, of that unparalleled world shock. The newspapers of those years, the libraries of books written on it, and the millions of seared memories are enough—more than enough.

And then——

A tall young man in officer's uniform greeted me one day when I arrived home from the pit—my brother Will who had taken a commission in the Durham Light Infantry. He had never handled a gun in his life, and never wanted to. There were masses like him, of course—but this one was different. So were they each individually different—to their own. I had read of wars in histories, and now read a little of its bloody story in every page of every newspaper. It was coming nearer, for a reservist or two whom I knew had gone down at Mons, which had just been fought. But now war had come home and stood before me.

Histories of the war have been written without end, stories of its blood, filth, courage and carnage. Yet the half will never be told. The tale of the doings and feelings in every nation away from the battle-lines has been recorded for the benefit of future generations, but little has been heard of the scenes and sorrows in the humble homes of those plain brick streets in a thousand cities, towns, villages, hamlets.

Millions dead; millions broken, A number, a metal disc to be identified. A small stone in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Gallipoli, the East. Name recorded on some memorial—endless memorials. All in the statistics

of the war ; material for the expert who gives judgment on the wise or unwise moves made by the G.H.Q.'s of every combatant nation. Vast, vague masses, parts of a mechanism, itself so vast that those who are supposed to control and use it to a given end are baffled and dominated by that which they are supposed to control.

The experts criticize or applaud this move or that. May the good God deal gently with such philosophers, for if they knew what ought to have been done how it should have been done how it was done or what was done, it is more than those who were supposed to control this Frankenstein knew as libraries of contradictory reminiscences of the great ones of the war clearly demonstrate.

The only thing that was certain was that the machine was made of human units—each one a son, husband, brother, flesh and blood, brain and soul, the fibre of whose being was eternally woven into the occupants of some home and theirs in him.

True, there were well-to-do homes concerned too and of them this is equally true. But the vast mass came from very humble houses. Few are the records of these in peace, in war none. The story of heartache and sorrow is too intimate, so is hidden. The tale of it is so excruciatingly painful that few want to read it and few tell it.

* * * * *

Brother Will had "joined up". Brother Tom soon followed as a private in the Border Regiment. Little did I think that ere this thing ran its course I would be riding "wheel" as a driver in the R.F.A.

Meanwhile there was the straight, tall, good-looking lad whom I had nursed as a baby, and who had grown up with me until he was mentally my superior. And we were knit together like those two who are spoken of in the Bible in rare, unforgettable words.

But there was one to whom this mattered more than any of us—mother. Hers was the story of millions of mothers—a story which has seldom been told, but of which I will risk the intimate telling crude and feeble as that will be at the best.

When Will was at home on a short leave, and all the family came together, it was easy to tell the toll this thing was taking of mother. She followed her son with her eyes, hung on his words, gave a multitude of little services which she left others to perform for themselves—and was very, very silent. If Dick, George, myself, and Will adjourned to his little room to talk, with the pictures of Byron, Shelley, and Keir Hardie on the walls, and books in the corner, we were not allowed to remain alone very long. Mother would find some reason, almost laughably plausible at times, to come and fuss about her boy. The unrestrained affection often was his. Time and release from the burdensome duties were mellowing her, but the old grim stern ways had not altogether departed, they never did. However old this would now do a little leg-pulling without offence, and that is true—nothing, but the joke was never really a joke unless Will was there. It was then wonderful to see that strong, dark and care-written face soften, while the old gleaming, fighting eyes turned to laughter. Then would she genially threaten to take us "through hands" again as when we were boys, and with pride express the belief that she could still do it, and that we probably still deserved it now and then. Will would urge her to "go on, mother," for he knew he would be exempt. As for him, she ate him with her eyes, and, though she said no word, it was plain that a struggle was going on within.

Round the table father would tell for the thousandth time how, when the brig *Richard* was once lying in Vladivostok, he and other sailors went ashore and were somehow landed in a Russian jail. They had done nothing. Sailors never do when in port in a strange land. Everyone knows that. Anyhow, the Czar's minions gave him

some kind of a contraption vaguely described as black bread, though he swore it had no relation to bread. Mother said it was probably better than father and his friends were entitled to if the truth was known. She called him Paul Jones after the gentleman who in Whitehaven was regarded as a cross between a pirate to be feared and an adventurer to be admired even though he had knocked the old town about a bit. The compliment did its work, so father let it go at that. But he finally made it clear to us all that he didn't think much of Russia. The combination of sawdust and glue called black bread, and the ill-conditioned jail, had settled his opinion of that country once and for all. Rarely beautiful and even tender were those few gatherings before the young soldier went over. Strange effect of war upon a family, that it should turn us to each other as never before. Outside, bread prices and many others of the kind. All moving to the end death-dealing guns and munitions. Millions under arms, forests of guns, machines in the air, stark, dull, monstrous machines called fleets covering the sea, human life, relationships, sentiments, aspirations, mothers' sons and mothers—nothing. And this monster was beckoning the boy soon would show its snarling teeth and issue its bellowing command to come to the passionless metallic slaughter.

The command came in January 1915 and Will went to spend his days in the soggy clay holes round Ypres. Durham men under him and all ground him, large numbers who were personally known to both of us, some from the pits where we worked and had worked.

On the road to Vermorel some were established near the rubble of what had once been a farmhouse, and promptly the boys named it Chester Farm, after the one owned by the Chester le Street Co-operative Society.

"This is not war—it is a permanent industry for making death," wrote Will in one of his letters, otherwise full of

his old buoyant self. In that he was only like many more millions, who in their misery shamed us with their courage, but much more, that, though they needed cheering if ever men on this earth needed it, they yet had resources in some unknown, unsuspected, secret innermost part of them to give consolation and cheer to those who were infinitely better placed at home. As long as the memories of that time live, or as long as the world lasts, if the tale can be adequately told, men can never think meanly of their own kind in the light of those days. The spirit of those men from the mean brick streets—not the war spirit, but the self-forgetting spirit—so amazed and dynamited those who had lived easily and richly that they forgot for the moment the existence of the old artificial social barriers.

“War is needed to develop courage and purge men of selfishness,” said a puerile philosopher of much reading to me the year before.

“Do a turn or two in the pit, or let your women change with our women for a season,” I replied, “and you will learn that courage and unselfishness are abounding to-day.” I thought I knew, but I didn’t. For even I was amazed at the self-forgetfulness abroad in the world, when the occasion came to the multitude for personal expression of it, and it was turned into one gleaming, roaring cataract of social sentiment. Well might the statesmen and all decent men and women be astounded at the exhibition, and vow that never again would these men go back to the old evil conditions under which masses had existed; it would have been far better if the promise had been kept. We did at least learn that the gentleness which makes men great is neither the handmaid of wealth nor social standing. If the war did nothing else, it pricked that bubble—and the gentlemen whom we call the worker know it too. They may have returned to the old conditions, but the old social superstition of a superior people who are entitled to a superior life has gone for ever.

True, it still exists on sufferance, but the old belief has gone, and as sure as the sun rises the old conditions are doomed. The home story of those millions finds no place in the endless annals of the war, it finds no place in the conditions of the peace. But those who lead this nation would do well to learn something of it, for the destiny of this land depends on the knowledge of the tale as it is told behind those common brick walls in common brick streets where sons went out and sorrow came in.

CHAPTER XXIV

Old Folks at Home

AS A BOY IN BOLDON COLLIERY I HAD SEEN THE BEGINNING of one of the most wonderful social movements in the world to-day, though of course neither I nor any grown-up could guess the wonder-working thing that would grow out of the miners of Boldon Colliery renting an old hall from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and installing therein their aged retired miners and their wives rent free, in security. Thus began the Aged Miners' Homes movement, which has grown until there are now nearly two thousand beautiful havens of rest in Durham, and some in Northumberland; and the success of that movement has so struck the imagination of the country that Arthur Greenwood, as Minister of Health, put a special clause in a Housing Act, which aims to do on a national scale the work the Boldon miners began in that old hall by means of a levy upon their wages of a penny a fortnight.

I knew the hall when it stood empty in its own grounds at Downhill, some way from the colliery, looking down on the farm below. Behind, in the white, cliff-like rocks leading up to the high lands above, were the lairs of many

foxes. It was a place of romance to a boy, and also a place where apples and plums grew in abundance, with a watchful farm family to be dodged by a boy who wanted to sample the fruit. I was very intimate with the building which became the first Aged Miners' Home when it was nobody's home.

There was in Durham at that time a great statesman, but nobody knew he was a statesman, least of all the man concerned. He was a miner, and his name was Joseph Hopper—better known as Joe. He was always seeing sweeping visions, but was also astonishingly practical. His own people who believed in him eventually sent him to the County Council, where a working man was then a rarity.

This was the man who conceived the idea of homes for aged miners and their wives. On June 2nd, 1894, he brought the project before the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund by resolution. The motion was adopted, but Hopper's Homes were considered a good joke—as were other schemes of his which would have benefited the Durham community to-day. By 1896 a few began to think there was something in the idea. The miners of Boldon paid their pence. Hopper, the secretary of the Durham Miners' Association, Mr. John Wilson, M.P., John Johnson, John Taylor, Bishop Westcott, Canon Moore Ede, now Dean of Worcester, and many of the wisest miners appealed to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to let them have the old hall and allow them to clean it, and make it home-like for the aged ones. It was somewhat of a wild-cat adventure, and 'as a boy I remember well' that, on the day of opening, pride was a little mixed with a sense of pantomime.

So do great movements often begin. The romance and achievements of this one are a story in themselves, and others have told it better than I could, but the concrete story is to be seen everywhere in Durham to-day—gleams of heartening sunshine in the midst of our depression.

"One thousand homes. One thousand tributes to the man who dreamed and worked. What finer or more enduring monument can a man leave behind him than this? These homes will stand from one generation to another, a monument in bricks and mortar to Joseph Hopper." So spake the late Robert Barron, as president of the association. But these homes—of which there are nearly two thousand now—are also a tribute to the miners who gave their pennies, and who now give them regularly, as a mark of affection and pride in their fathers and mothers. "Honour thy father and thy mother." In these touchingly beautiful homes the miners of Durham do more than "honour"; they make love and affection a real living thing in this cold, matter-of-fact world. No boot-licking, philanthropic sentiment is there about this "homes" business. Out of their own sweat and toil the miners have done this thing. Well-disposed people have been stirred to aid because of the magnificence of the things they have seen, and all honour to them, but it is the men of the pit who conceived, built, and maintain these homes out of pride of their own. Sturdily impatient and scornful of charity, they have sheltered their own in places beautiful as a dream, and these homes have been created by their own efforts.

To one of the new homes, near the church opposite the school, my mother and father went in due time. Church bells, the laughter of little children, sweeping green fields all round, a semi-circle of inviting little cottages, with their green in the front and little garden at the back. Old comrades of the pit who formed a little community talking over the past, and giving decided opinions on the present, behind the haze of tobacco smoke. "Shouldering their crutch and showing how fields were lost and won." But the crutch was really a pick, and the narrow field was far below hemmed in by rock and gleaming coal. Men and women cut out of the granite of grim circumstance, steel-hewn characters, the centre of affection for all the colliery.

If ever a man and woman had earned the beauty, love, and Gibraltar-like security of that home, it was my mother and father.

*Home is the sailor, home from the sea
And the hunter home from the hill,*

had a new meaning here, which would have well satisfied Stevenson, who made the great couplet in another sense.

The home mellowed, and cast the sun of the summer's evening upon them in what is called the winter of life ; but they also irradiated the home ; mother as cryptic and forthright in opinion as ever, summing up, and forbidding with stern face and stony silent look those against whom she had decided, but taking the few she chose in the arms of her warm spirit, so that she held them fast in an affection and friendship of which the recipients were proud ; father gathering men round him, telling his tales, more than ever the colliers' interested centre of attractively coloured yarns.

Into this little centre of serene life came that fatal telegram which a million others received. It was in February, 1916. In an attempt to extricate a man from an engulfing clay-hole, exposed as a sniper's target, Will had himself received the bullet. A few Durham men who were there tell the story even to-day ; I will leave it there. The end was in harmony with the days of his life—doing the decent thing. The scene in that home when the telegram came was as the scene in a million others.

But an incident in that sad home is burnt into my memory as with fire. Mother had silently rumbled about a drawer for some time ; then she turned to my six-year-old daughter, who had been talking, as a child will, to "Granny" about her little baby sister, and handed to the child a baby's toy, saying, "Take that home for your babby, hinny. My babby's gone." Gone ! The words

came like the dullness of the first clay on a coffin. There was no sign of emotion, but there was a far-away look in the eyes and a tensing of the mouth as she repeated "Gone." The straight, fair, wavy-haired soldier who had crumpled before an enemy bullet was her "babby." She saw him only as he had crooned in her arms, or slept in his cradle. All the pent-up affection which had been stifled by the battle for bread, all the glory of motherhood, had burst its bonds and ran to him. And now, not the soldier, but her babby, had gone. Tears there were none. It was not her way. There was no work showing that she felt deeply. She would let no one know of these things. She was very near to the animal mother which seeks in solitary silence the young which is lost. So my mother went to her room alone, shut herself in, and would see no one. For weeks she stayed there, resenting the intrusion even of those who took her food. Words of consolation died on the lips, for they seemed not to be heard. No one ever saw her weep. Dry eyed, apparently stone hard, she sat there, a picture of inarticulate suffering, defying description. We feared for her mind, but that survived. In time the little duties to which she had been drilled by domestic pressure—these things called her. But to us who knew, the lost youngest one was ever with her. In a shy way she would bring from a drawer some article of clothing which had been his, and talk about it, and him. Always he was with her.

During her last illness, while sitting almost asleep by her bed in the night, I was startled by a cry which seemed hardly human.

"Willie, oh, Willie," she cried, as she sat up with wide-open arms, then closing them as though she was hugging her "babby" to her breast. As I looked at her it seemed to me that her face had gone very young, and a light of gentleness and tender affection lay upon it such as neither I nor any other had ever seen. Almost it seems sacrilege to speak of this thing, for it was the holy thing that is motherhood I saw. That beauty of the rare tenderness of

a mother which we had seldom seen seemed to flood her, and the affection walled in by a grim steel-like will burst through. A lifetime of motherhood lay upon her face during those few minutes, and I, who had been born of her, nurtured, clothed, and sustained by her, only knew my own mother by that revelation on her dying bed. I knew then in that night-watch what war means for mothers.

CHAPTER XXV

A Good Character

IN 1919 I WAS ONCE MORE AT THE PIT, DISCHARGED FROM the Army—with a “good character.” That was very kind of them, for I had lost any hope of ever more being considered as a “good character,” or indeed as anybody at all. I had been called names, red sulphurous names, rude names; I had been so vigorously described, including my ancestry, that I had really begun to think very little of myself—which of course is the object of Army discipline. My education was continued by horses and mules. Two sets of harness to be kept in order, dissected, mixed up—103 pieces it was rumoured—and put together again, a real crossword puzzle. Polish, scrub, grease, pass eagle-eyed examination. But to turn a respectable County Councillor getting on to forty into a circus rider is an infliction on a riding-master, even if he is of the fullest-blooded kind in the vocabulary. As to the County Councillor, we will spare his feelings. The real lesson in humiliation was left to the mules, high lofty quadrupeds, sharp-ridged in the back, lacking shape, with hack-saw tempers. Seven out of ten are docile as children, but the other three have justified the mule’s reputation. This is one case in which minority rule is justified. “Join the Army and see life,” is the slogan. I did. The first time I mounted a mule I

saw more life in ten minutes than I'd seen all the years before. Such was the beginning of many trials, and by no means the end. I rose to the full rank of a driver—lead-centre or wheel, leg iron included, at one and sixpence a day. I was heterodox about the war as run by newspapers, and had few illusions, as I was too familiar with the stark facts of the historic decimations called war. And knowledge was rammed home by experience.

But in those days many decisions had to be taken of which a man may not lightly speak. Suffice it to say I volunteered, and the reasons are known to my own people at the pit, who were as keen in their criticism of my action as they were kindly considerate of those I left behind. The little lady who had joined me in life and shared my enthusiasms, and had gone to service in a University city, and returned again to colliery life, now had to do the best she could to supplement the few shillings a week from my allotment and the Government allowance. Rent and coals were given by the men at the colliery—and after the good wife had to perform some of those miracles which come so easy to her. All round, the people were very kind, but none outside ever saw the tears which made the children wonder, because it was so unlike mother. Strange are the ways of life: while I was writing this chapter a letter arrived from one whom I had not seen since those days. He and I were in the same lot. He was an Irish Canadian. A good, clean, blunt man, with whom I was very friendly. After the war he rejoined for regular service, and served in India. He wrote from hospital, where he lay far advanced in tuberculosis, without a relative to give him cheer, and, as the chaplain in a short note said, obviously far on in the evening of life. He, lying there dying, without the consolation of close friends, wrote to me as an old chum asking humbly and so courteously for some little wrong to be righted. In an hour or two I stood by his bed, and ever as I talked with him the question rapped in my brain, "What have you done that life should treat you so kindly, when it treats this good man

thus ? " Merits and demerits, vices and virtues there may be, though the finding on which side the balance lies may not be so easy as appearances warrant. If poor decent Walsh has had a fair deal, then life has been more kind to me than I deserve. So is life on the whole ; pointing the moral that the most fortunate has more reason for gratitude.

Following the Armistice in 1918, I was sent home temporarily to fight in the General Election of that year. I fought the Seaham Division—the first Labour man to do so—and counted it no small matter to get over nine thousand votes, even though there was a majority of ten thousand against me. That was far more votes than I ever expected to get, but the men and women of three or four collieries rallied round magnificently ; also old schoolmates, old workmates—these all made up in enthusiasm for the solid blocks of hostility. A Labour candidate, especially one of their own, was a strange creature in that division then, and even more suspect when he attacked the " make the Germans pay " insanity which everyone remembers, but all try to forget to-day. Everyone wanted reparations then ; nobody wants them now. But, as I didn't want what no one wants now, I was in a minority of ten thousand.

The wonder is that all the people who voted for reparations try to blame someone else now—and even the newspapers which shouted loudest for reparations are silent now. " Be sure your sins will find you out " may be a text for Sundays, but it is also a very real truth in politics, as well as life. The Election over, I was instructed to proceed to Clipstone, in Derbyshire, for demobilisation.

After receiving my discharge, I boarded a train for Nottingham. A yell went up that all men of my batch were summoned to get out. I stuck fast in the carriage, where there was a young officer or two. The shouting continued, and it was proper that the batch should be kept together. But I knew the choice was probably between a hot meal in a Y.M.C.A. in Nottingham, and a long wait on that exposed wintry-like platform. The calling for us

to get out was so insistent that one of the officers drew my attention to it. I told him it was all right, as I was going to Nottingham. I was in khaki, so he ordered me out, and seemed to have received an electric shock when I replied, "Mr. from you, young man." The amazement of the others was turned to extreme hilarity when I held up my discharge, saying, "Civilian, now, gentlemen." We had a great time together, and I a good supper in Nottingham. But I did relish that opportunity to speak as a free man.

Back at the pit once more, the needs of those around, dependants of those killed, and the condition of the broken called for much time and energy. And it was clear that the need was not only great, but that the time would come when the public purse would be jealously guarded, and when public feeling would not be so easily moved. So it was a case of get what you could while the going was good. And in this work there were large numbers in the land who gave unstinted service to the war-broken and the dependants of the dead. The recipients were worthy of the service, but those who served added a new good chapter of social service to the nation's history.

The recoil from hard tack, hard riding, and a hard life in the open tested me, and I was much troubled in health - which was a new experience for me. But it helped me to appreciate the condition of the masses of men who had served for years, and made me very sensitive as to their claim upon the nation. At the time of enlistment I had resigned my offices in the county union, and was thus free, when fit, to throw myself into the work of salvage, and also into that of turning the wheels of the County Council machine to do the work so much needed as the result of the war. We had scarcely turned round when the triennial elections were upon us. Few guessed the sweeping mental changes that had taken place, and even those of us who knew something of the change were astounded at the depth of it as revealed in those elections. Ill and confined in bed, I acted as connecting-link for the Labour candidates

in the county—doing the work as well as I could, but, I am afraid rather haphazardly. When the Election was over, instead of less than a dozen, we suddenly found ourselves with a majority in the Council and the power to elect aldermen. When the Government was properly formed, we had more aldermen than we had councillors before the Election. The outbreak of peace was no less sensational than the outbreak of war, and it was evident for the first time that the guns had blown more than bodies to pieces; they had also blown the old-world ideas, prejudices, and trust in the governing class into nothingness. Events in this land during subsequent years have confirmed that view. The curtain has been rung down on the last act of the play where the players were the well-to-do and financially powerful. There are those who would smile at this, for appearances at present seem to justify the belief that another act is on, the players being the same. But this is no act, just a scene before the curtain while the real actors are getting ready for the next act, which will make it abundantly clear that we shall no longer have servants no longer rule.

Whether that be so or not, the fact remains that a revolutionary change had come upon us in Durham early in 1919, a change that brought power to the miners for the first time—but also duties and responsibilities. The pit, too, claimed me, with its problems. Power may temper visions, but when you have lived almost alone with your dreams, and then a great number suddenly join you it is exhilarating. If your faith rests on social power, then your faith dies when you have no power. But if your faith rests on visions of a people putting fresh, new values on themselves, shaping their lives and outlook instinctively by those new values; becoming more temperate; respecting their homes, aspiring for their children, hungering for better houses and conditions so that they and those for whom they are responsible may be morally and mentally enlarged, if when your faith rests on these things, and you see them growing, flowered with courtesy

and fine feeling, then you are neither a pessimist when power is lost, nor do you lose a sense of proportion when it is gained. And these have come in my time, fanning the flame within ; increasing fellowship and understanding, sounding the deeps of me, telling what neither political nor economic expert can tell of the deep, unalterable change that has come over the worker during these later years. You can observe these changes, statistics may reveal it ; but you have to live in it and feel it before you know how his new life-value throbs beneath all the contacts. The external power necessary to great changes will come as certain as the night follows the day, but best of all is the fact that the power of awakened vision of new manhood and womanhood has come for therein lies the assurance that those changes will be sure, steady, lasting because they are based on solid mental and moral foundations. There is much to make one glad in these days, and to live in the midst of an industrial area like Durham is to know the pain which is acute at times, but to know its men and women is to be strengthened in faith and inspired in action.

CHAPTER XXVI

Pits are Pits

Bobby Shaftoe's gone to war
 With silver buckles on his knee,
 When he comes back he'll marry me
 Hurrah for Bobby Shaftoe !

THAT OLD FOLK-SONG IS NATIVE TO DURHAM, AND SHOWS that there is poetry even in the midst of industrialism. In this area where I live we have Peggy's Wicket, Blue

House Farm ; The Jingling Gate—which is a public house—The Shepherd and Shepherdess, with their figures over the door in blue and gold, and a legend around them. But the real legend is the Money Hills standing high, amid a mass of helio heather, where the Romans hid all their money before they left the district for ever. If you don't believe, ask the children, who will tell you all about it with a certainty defying contradiction. And just beyond is the hall where the original Bobby Shaftoe lived, and where a Shaftoe has lived ever since. All around are woods where fairies live, for in the dusk of evening a little girl told me, with bated breath, how she had waited behind a tree until they came and danced. What made her think they were there? Why, she had seen their stools, and everyone knows that toadstools are made for fairies to dance round and shelter under. So, you see, neither machinery, films, nor wireless have yet killed wonder and poetry around here, where we wander through fields and woods at will. Which is saying much, for, as a rule, once industry begins bringing work "Trespassers will be Prosecuted" hits you in the eye at every turn, reminding you that freedom has departed. But this is one of the few places where the freedom of wood and field remains—and some poetry. Going to work, I went through fields clustered with the gold of gorse in the summer, and it was delicious to lie concealed, watching the magpies in the trees—for they are "scary" birds. When duty let me out of its iron cage it was good in that summer and autumn of 1919 to dive down into the deep gorge called the Forges, where the burn once turned wheels to grind corn, make paper, or steel files, and where a little population once lived in the old slow days. But now that population has gone, and the ruins of houses are overgrown with weeds and ivy.

It takes a long time for the sun to strike down there, but, when it has bested the mist, the warm gold of it is cupped in the narrow gorge as though it would stay for good. On an October forenoon the dewdrops will sparkle

on the grass blades, so that autumn would cheat the senses with a make-believe spring, were it not for the riot of colour proclaiming the fullness of the year. Yet riot is scarcely the word, for the brown, orange, yellow green and many shades in each colour - all these so merge and harmonise that they make a restful whole. A black path runs along the side of the stream, which gives low, clear, restful music in the quiet of that hemmed-in place.

In such a place, at such a time you learned how the fever of life had burned you up in recent years, as it did all men and women in that time. Body sick, nerve strained were we all. Some rooted in drugs to silence the nerves, while others went in masses shouting, crashing, smashing, seeking somehow to destroy that which had fevered, maimed, and ruined them and theirs. But the quiet, colour, and miniature belled undercurrents of the running stream gave secret restful balms to the body.

Yet even here the pits have come, for you suddenly come on an engine house with tiny shaft gear, and the hill-sides are pierced with tunnels, or "drifts". And though drifts are in the midst of rural wonders, they are still pits, and "pit-work is queer work". In a pit the wafter will soak a man, for he will work in water and at times he in it while working, so that rheumatism will come twisting and torturing his body. If you meet him leaning heavily on a stick, he will surely tell you he is not so bad - and trying some new cure, and he may even tell you he thinks the trouble came through "working wet" but not always, for he has worked wet so often he doesn't see why it should affect him now.

And in one such drift, not far away from this gorge, a friend of mine had a son of eighteen years working when the place caved in on him. Word came home to the father, who lived near the drift. He did not run, he leaped to the place. A great raw-boned man he was, a top-notch man. Straight into the low tunnel he went, where, behind and under a great fall, lay the body of his boy. The father was a raving madman of energy, groans,

spitting teeth, wrestling with giant boulders, which would have crushed even his great strength at ordinary times. I have seen a town of stone at such times sometimes disintegrate. Only one man could work at once, and all must stand back for this one man, a man of giant strength and craft—strength multiplied and craft more pointed because of the exquisite pain of the worker. It was agony to watch the man, for he neither spared himself nor cared for himself while both for him and the workers there was the sure, dreaded knowledge of what he would find. And when he came at last to the broken, bleeding, lifeless body of his lad, he gathered him up in his great arms and, stooping low, carried him to the light of day. Straight up the street he carried him in his arms to his home, heeding nothing, knowing nothing in the world but that this in his arms was his boy. A drama of the pits, a sensation for a day or two—but not more, for the same drama with different actors has come so often in the lives of those who see these things. And just beyond the tragedy there was Nature, genial, serene, and humming birds in the trees. So whether the pits are deep in a hill or drifted into the hullside, pits are pits, and they are tigers, clawing and rending men and boys every day the wheels go round.

CHAPTER XXVII

The House of Commons

SO MANY GOOD FRIENDS HAVE COME MY WAY IN LIFE that, if ever there was an enemy, he has been crowded out, and I have forgotten all about him.

When I come to think about it, there is one on whom it was ever necessary to keep an eye—myself. From anyone else who would hurt on the journey of life, there has always been a secret boy's dream cave of retreat in the philosophy

of George Borrow's gypsy. "Why mourn brother? There is the sea and the sky, and there is always wind on the heath, brother."

The sense of it was in me before I read the words. But a good friend is also like the wind in the face which quickens the blood, and I was fortunate in possessing many friends.

John Taylor, who was the Member for Chester-le-Street Parliamentary Division, was one such was his calibre that he might have held the seat in Parliament all his days for he was held in esteem by all in the division. But a 1919 illness compelled him to resign the seat. He had often talked to me of the possibility of my succeeding him, but just as often had I done my best to persuade him to continue. For he was so highly esteemed and had been the Member so long, that it was almost impossible to think of him not being the Member for that division.

Also Durham had greater attractions for me than London, especially as, owing to long absence, I was weary for home. But the serious illness of Mr. Taylor, followed by his resignation, settled the matter. By the desire of a multitude of friends, I sought release from Seaham and stood as candidate at the by-election for my own home division late in 1919.

Mr. Lloyd George was then Prime Minister, and he had conceived the idea of a Centre Party, with a number of ex-Labour men as a nucleus. Some were already in Parliament, firing broadsides daily at the small Labour Party there. An ex-secretary of the Scottish Miners was sent up to fight me. But our own people had never taken kindly to the idea of a stranger as their Member, and worse still for my opponent, the tinsel was beginning to wear off the Coalition. So I was returned as Member for Chester-le-Street with a majority of eleven thousand.

Ambition has ever been applauded, and it may be a great asset in the world of affairs. Men seldom know themselves properly, and I may be wrong if I say I was never ambitious—whether it be a vice or a virtue, I know not. To enjoy the doing of a thing at hand, and go all the

way in doing it, caring little for what lay beyond, was ever my way. But who can fight a Parliamentary election especially a by-election and be elected for his home division without being proud? So it was with not a little sense of pride that I walked up the floor of the House of Commons one day in November, 1919; took the oath, shook hands with the Speaker, and went to my seat. All the bare days of childhood, the sweaty wrestle in the pit, the years of battle for a definite place for the toiler in the social and political life of the nation—all the dream and work of the years was crowded into that moment. I sat down and looked round the assembled company. This was the House of Commons!

I think it is true to say that the House of Commons fills a larger place in the minds of the boys and girls and men and women of Britain, than other assemblies do in the minds of citizens of most other countries. That may savour of national and personal egotism, but travel has taught me not only that this is true, but that the British House of Commons holds a very high place in the minds of people of other lands. The Mother of Parliaments is not only a historic fact, but also a living truth when you are abroad.

But whether you are in Parliament or at home, the pit is ever present. Yesterday news arrived of the tragic death in the mine of a young man whom I had talked with while at home at the week-end, and whom I had known from boyhood onwards. At this moment, two men and a boy are imprisoned by a fall, and the evening papers tell how men have worked all night to remove the fall, not knowing whether they will find mangled bodies or release prisoners. These two collieries are within a stone's throw of each other, and practically at my own door. The breathless suspense of drama is there; hope, fear, heroism, all the elements of tragedy. But up and down Britain every day, in one way or another, this is going on away down there where the thin glint of a light only increases the gloom of starless eternal night. But to thrill by telling

of these stories has not been the aim in this book. The simple telling of what one has seen would be drama, but I have deliberately renounced the temptation to do this in order to tell the plain tale of a plain average family of the pits: for my own story is subordinate to that. One pit man arrives in Parliament, but million live all their lives about the pits, and it is the millions who matter.

So, as one of the million pitmen privileged to be elected, I looked at Parliament through their eyes for life, experience, and the texture of me was part of the whole warp and woof. And though the cultivated reasoning gentleman's mind is useful in Parliament as elsewhere, the real contribution is made from experience, and better be "narrow" and speak with the authority of experience than very broad and make no contribution at all.

So there I sat looking at the new scene through the long, low, dark underground tunnel of the coal mine, peering with the conscious prejudice of my class. It was in some respects very much like the present National Government Parliament. There were sixty Labour men, a few Liberals, and a great overweighted Government already losing hold on public opinion in spite of a strong Front Bench drawn from combined parties. There were many war-made millionaires in that House—the Hard faced Parliament it was called. But there were also large numbers on all sides who had served in the war, and we soon discovered that these were no more in love with the hard faced ones, even when they sat beside them, than we were. At times there were joint assaults on the common enemy, undesigned, unarranged battles where irregular troops from unexpected quarters spontaneously fought together. Tory, Liberal, and Labour had no love for each other—but nobody loved the war profiteer. In the House and in committee that gentleman was baited. Between his ill-gained profits, purchased baronetcies, and negotiations for peerages—particulars of which were common knowledge—the new rich had a hot time. At bottom, it was this which brought the Coalition down. All wars amaze the world

by the commonness of courage, but they also give point to the fact that the money-making mind is the cheapest on earth. In due time Britain came to that conclusion, for the war-time money-makers, with just the sense of their kind, walked right into the limelight of Parliament to be seen of all men. No wonder the country turned sick at the sight, and sent nearly two hundred Labour Members to the next Parliament, so that the Labour Party became the official Opposition.

But even profiteers could not obliterate the intrinsic qualities of the Parliament of Britain, with its traditions of forceful speech; the right to say things in there which it might be legally risky to say outside; its grin at snobbery, its hefty, looking-each-other-in-the-eye debates; great orators and personalities from all walks of life; the storms and clashes, sometimes brought to an abrupt, hilarious end by a witty word from the bewigged, experienced, respected Speaker—more stately than a king in his great canopied chair. Elected by the Members, with time tested, keenly scrutinised qualities, Mr. Speaker, whoever he be by name, embodies the hardly won liberties of the people—even to the executing of a king; he asserts the prerogatives and privileges of the Commons, is the champion of the Opposition and the minorities, the guide of the debates and of the whole work of Parliament. He may rebuke, but he will also help. Hour after hour he sits, keeping close track of the debate, holding the House to the subject lest it wander abroad and get nowhere, as it surely would if most of us were allowed to wander where we want. It is time we ceased to speak of the patience of Job, and became up-to-date by talking of "the patience of a Speaker."

The sum of my feelings as I daily watched the assembly, and took part in its life, was that more than ever I was convinced that the workers were right in shaping their course to capture this citadel, for it is a place of great strength and power, just as capable of great things for the humblest in the land as it has been for the wealthy in the past.

A few days after I made my first speech in the House when I didn't know whether I was on my head or feet I went down home to the old place to see my brothers and sisters and parents. Father at once expressed his satisfaction that I had been "telling them off," the persons who had been "told" being the Government. So and so had said "this" and another one "that" about my speech, and he remembered once telling Captain - that led on to Vladivostok, and then to the Russian Revolution. It was high time there was one. The Czar had lost one good supporter when his servants put father in jail, and tried the hoax called black bread on him. But mother, now past seventy years, dominant still, told him to "let t' lad be" and "Away, hinny; here's some nice broth just what thou likes." So I sat down to a great basin of broth thick with meat and small pieces of dumplings while mother smiled, saying "What doesn't fatten him to - but there was meat in now. Then she said: "Jim said 'I see your John's made a great speech.'"

"Of course he has. Isn't that what they sent him for?" was her reply. Then, in the old vein, "T' likes of him is good for nowt. Coom on me lad, hev some mair broth."

CHAPTER XXVIII

In Office

"NOO THERE'S BEEN A FINE CARRY-ON HERE!" MY mother stood in the kitchen of her little home, with smiling yet puzzled face. Her remark was even half a question as she looked at me. *

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Matter? Why, half of London's been here. Furst, men with note-books asking lots of questions; then some

more followed them. And, just as I was on me knees baking t' bread, a fellow popped in and put his photograph thing down. He telled me just to stop where I was. I asked him what he wanted, but he just clicked his machine, picked it up, and went out."

"You would think everybody had gone daft," said father, when he could get a word in. Both were quite sure that every pressman and photographer who had visited them had come from London.

That was the result of having a son in the first Labour Government of 1924. I was given the post of Financial Secretary to the War Office. A Northern newspaper announced that I was to open some Homes for Aged Miners, and the lively imagination of the men of the pen leaped to it. A little probing, and they learned I was to stay overnight at "home" with my parents. London scented a story—and then the deluge. Mother had her doubts about the visitors; they were people to keep your eye on, being strangers. Father had the time of his life telling the bright young men all about Calcutta, the ways of the Horn, and generally salting them with spray. The pressmen had come to see a pitman, and they found him also a tar of the deep salt seas, as in olden times.

The days had been electric for me, but nothing in all that experience of the coming of Labour's first Government, and my own appointment—nothing so thrilled me and was so satisfying as to stand in that kitchen with my mother's arm on my shoulder, and to hear her shyly, happily saying: "I telled them I sometimes walloped thoo"; then slyly, "and that thoo sometimes needed it." And there, for the first time, I was really proud of being a member of a Government. Proud for these two who had toiled, schemed, sacrificed, in order that their brood might have the necessaries of life. From Kells to Boldon was not a far journey across country, but what a journey to those two!—a journey of years which made a rugged, unforgettable poem, an Epstein-like piece of sculpture, a massive history of infinite detail. All these were merged.

in those two lives, like mountains towering to the sky they were unconscious of their strength and wonder.

The coming of that first Labor Government was a terrific shock to the divinely ordained to rule element in the country. Capital in the nineteenth century and land owners thought the earth and all that was therein was theirs. If power passed outside that vague bounded but very real, ruling class, the heavens would fall. Land took it badly when industry presumed to question its monopoly of political wisdom. But their quarrel settled they both looked to the social and political fences to keep out the cattle.

How could the men of the mines and factories, the multitudes from the long lines of brick streets hope to stand beside the makers of a science, a literature and a mechanical world which was the wonder of all men? Their Press answered, Impossible.

And lo! while they were proving its impossibility the thing was done, and strange things were afoot in Government Departments.

It was worth while living to be one of the first of the new tribe to walk into those great buildings in Whitehall.

My friend Clem Attlee (Under-Secretary of State to the War Office) said to me one day up in the officers' mess in Woolwich after a meal there: "That great chandelier must look fine when lit up."

"Yes, it does," I replied absently.

"Have you been here before?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The last time I was here I was serving these tables as officers' orderly on fatigue, after 'stables.'"

My fellow-member of the Army Council nearly needed a doctor to take the stitches out of his side.

From the first, I met courtesy and helpfulness departmentally and in all other matters. Let the superior smile in their wisdom. They are the knowing ones, they are, when dealing with Civil Servants. Well, it is just possible

that one may learn more from men from the pits than from men from a drawing room ; Civil Servants are like us all human beings.

The social side did not attract me at all.

The attraction of it is to me an increasing mystery, and I dodged it even when it was in the line of duty. But on one occasion, while in that Office, I could not. French military representatives had come over in respect of the evacuation of the Ruhr. A dinner was arranged for some half-dozen, Army, Air Service, and visitors combined. The late Mr. Stephen Walsh, who was Secretary of State for War, was taken ill and could not attend, so the Financial Secretary had to take his place. It was a quiet, friendly useful gathering. The late General Thompson, then Secretary of State for Air, kept the French General on my left fully occupied in that vivid way of his.

He had talked French some time when he suddenly leaned over towards me saying :

" How old were you when you commenced working in the mine, Jack ? "

" Twelve," was my reply.

" How long did you work ? "

" Nearly twenty years."

This he conveyed to the General, who was plainly astonished.

" You—you—a miner, and now Finance Minister in the War Office ? " he said in French, for he was limited to that language.

" Yes, I worked nearly twenty years in the pit, and I carry its marks on me," I said in doubtful French, as I showed him my hands.

" You speak French ? " he said.

" Yes," I replied. " Durham French."

But, like all his ever-courteous countrymen, he swore I spoke well—which was " all my eye." Still, we had a good " crack." But I think the fact of a real working miner in that Office shocked him more than my Durham French, for he kept looking at me, and in varying terms expressing

his astonishment. The Representative of a Republic, with its theory of equality, should have naturally expected such a thing ; but it was the last thing looked for in fact, which only goes to show that there are different kinds of Republics, whatever you may call them.

Those were great days for fun, which must be indulged in with solemn face as a rule. It was one of my jobs to look after industrial establishments and stores which employed some thirty thousand workmen. I had to negotiate wages and conditions with their representatives, the State being employer and I its business agent. The old rough and tumble days' experience, coupled with years of intricate work as the workers' negotiator, was then a tower of strength to me. I was at home here, for one gets soaked in the psychology and practice of it. The fun began when the Minister began explaining solemnly how things were done in his union ; just as gravely was our way questioned, and the respective methods weighed in the balance --but all the time with a twinkle in the eye.

It was this kind of thing in administration which justified a minority Labour Government, even when a majority in **Opposition** saw to it that no large policy of fundamental change could be carried out. That a Labour Government administration brings relief and succour to masses cannot be denied, and that it was so in 1924 is a fact. I am not entering into argument with those who believe in "all or nothing," refusing to accept responsibility for minority rule ; but that the worker, his home, and his conditions are seriously considered in matters of administration under a minority Labour Government, I will bear witness from experience. If you were in danger of becoming more absorbed in the work of the Department than the human beings for whom it existed, the arrival home brought you back to realities. To come back to the same kind of house, in the same kind of street as your friends of the pit, and to talk things over during the week-end, was to have the spirit quickened. I know that was, and is, my experience ; and, though it would bring all the desires of the years to a

satisfying climax to do some sweeping thing which would thrill the toilers as a whole, it has been no little satisfaction to do many things which you knew would ease the lot of some whom it may be, you actually knew personally. But, above all, the old supremacy of wealth was challenged, and was passing, when the worker emerged in Whitehall.

That was the beginning, not the end.

And the end will not merely consist in changes of economic organisation—deep as they will be—but in fresh new values being placed on the patient, humble toiler. No Socialism is social which does not do that. In the pit I said it, and I say it all the more emphatically after years in Parliament, and experience in Governments.

CHAPTER XXIX

Unemployment

PITS CHANGE, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, AND IN THESE times change begets change so swiftly that it is hard to keep step. But they are still pits—stooping, wriggling, sweaty dens of danger. The trapper is no more, but gone with him is the apprenticeship which led gently to driving. The trapper merged into the driver with pride and assurance, but the lad now goes quickly to driving, and is not so certain of himself as in the days of old. So an added admitted danger has come with progress.

Mechanical devices encroach on the putter's work, while the machine challenges the pick and shovel. Still there are masses of hewers and putters, for craft and skill at times succeed where the machine fails as an economic proposition. But progress continues in all things, and the machine is sweeping forward. Efficiency arrives, independence departs, danger remains, and the old pleasures

of craft—for it was there in spite of appearances—has fled before efficiency. Still a new craft comes, but not so individual, the lonely working place has yielded to a socialised craft; human lines of rhythmic dependency on each other—hillers rather than hewers. Yet I have met those who would rather have this than the old way. But progress must be maintained, so a contrivance that scoops up the coal is on the horizon, and the few will do what the many did. Great Progress, we worship only thee. Many will be freed from danger and toil, as many have been, because one can do what ten did, and produce ten times more. And the many shall go to idleness and live scanty lives, as masses have already done. Let us worship the god of Progress, who frees only to destroy us. But if costs are reduced we will get more trade—costs are reduced—but we don't get the trade. But progress has taken place in other lands too. Machines in them have also freed men, and science has taught them how to make poor coal good coal, and also good men idle men. Even when those countries have no coal they turn from our coal to water power or oil. Still, we calculate the **fractions** that go to the winning of a contract, and increase machines to help it, thereby neutralising the value of our fractions. So Unemployment has come, the misshapen son of Progress, snarling at all men like the shambling, wart-eyed one of Notre-Dame. Pride, hope, laughter, flee before the dread thing, and those who were erect, prideful, courageous, now droop their shoulders and drift. Where? Yes, where? That is the question for civilised men of all lands. To decay and death, if the will is not there to master this machine which is mastering the world, or to socialise it so that its work shall be for the social good instead of ill: to increase the leisure and life of all rather than to rot millions.

Thus has it come to pass in my lifetime. In my pit days there was work for all miners. We could give the manager the "sack," as we used to say. That is, we could look him in the eye, and say "My money, please,"

and move on to the next colliery. The average miner could get courtesy because he was wanted—but he got it also, when the manager regarded the courtesy highly, just as other men. No better and no worse. We never lacked a day's work, or the pride and pleasure of putting our pay into the hand of wife or mother. And if you think there was no pride you know nothing about it. Then, the day's or week's work over, to put aside the pit things and relax to a little pleasure—sport, a book, the garden, or music. A man's work done, beholden to no one, genial to all. Hard, driving, dangerous work, giving little returns — but yet work, so that a man felt he had a place in the world. But now! Good men, bad men, indifferent men, it is all one, idle, drifting to moral death. Great is Progress, and mightily to be praised. But nowhere is there any hope; nowhere, I say. If there is, then I who hope when most men doubt, being so constituted, cannot see that hope. Desire, yes, but the will is wanting, for often we desire things for which we will not pay the price. There is no lack of charity, for the one consolation in this time is that kindness lies over the land like the gladdening, glistening morning dew on roses in June. But kindness will not do it, unless it marks the growth of the social sense that instinctively warns us of the danger, so that we are shocked into forcing our will to find a way out of it.

The way is plain. Are not there sick men who work, who should be living in God-made places with no care in the world? Are not there over-burdened, overworked men whose burden should be lightened? Is there not a world of men, women, and children longing for the things the idle long to produce? Then let the charity and kindness of all will that these things shall be done, and they will. World problems, you say. Then let the nations take steps to will it, for other peoples, too, are as kindly as ours. There is danger. Yes, there is—from that drifting, hopeless mass which desires nothing but to go into pits, fields, factories, anywhere, to do anything that they might be men with a place in the world once more.

But how? Why, by willing it as a nation, by willing it as a world. And if individuals won't or can't, then let the nations do it. Let them reduce hours, heal the sick, care for the fatherless and aged. Let them find in an old gospel a new economic and social doctrine. And, it needs be, let them boldly take hold of the mighty machine to do it. The preservation of your art literature science, and all those soul-stirring accumulations of the ages the sum-total of which go to form what is called civilisation is involved in the doing of these things. The road may be difficult, but the way is so plain that the wayfaring man, though he be a fool, may not err therein.

You and I, reader, can thank a kindly Providence that we are not among that mass of hopeless ones for there are as good or better than you or I among them. But whether we are there or not the world's future or whether it has a future at all depends upon whether we have vision and courage to do what ought to be done. This crude litany of pessimism is running through the hearts and minds of all men to-day everywhere. It is the will that is wanting- the will expressed in social terms. It will not come from the wise and great. They are too wise and too great. It is never those who rise mightily to the occasion in such times as this in man's history. And I know their concern and burden too. But if salvation cannot come from the great unnamed mass with its great reservoirs of emotional power, it cannot come at all. In all ages, at such times as this it has been from the simple unnamed ones, with their self-sacrificial spirit, with their power drawn from the heart rather than the head it has been from these that social salvation has come. Get knowledge, but give the heart freedom to free man from the fetters riveted by highly mechanical achievements. So I come back to the simple ones, the workers, to solve their own problem. It is when I meet good men, sometimes old friends, whose lot storms your soul with the immediate need and urgency of the thing, that my shoulders, too, droop with the hopelessness I have expressed.

But when I sum up once more the total of the world's experience in unemployment, the insistent voices ever growing in volume, the obvious brooding of it in all men's minds and the great kindness and concern for each other that has been born in my lifetime, then I grow in faith that the will will leap to life and make an end of idleness. When that comes, no man's interest shall stand in the way.

Socialism, people may call the new thing. I care not what it is called as long as men work. That is the problem of this nation, of every nation, the problem of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER XXX

Farwell and Forward

OFTEN WHILE WRITING THESE REMINISCENCES I HAVE been tempted to turn aside and select some one deed of the mine, where brave, kindly men took their lives in their hands, enduring far beyond our understanding, in order to rescue some man or men trapped by a great fall. And at such times, managers, officials, and often doctors, share the risk and trials. How danger and death melt men of different social degree into one common whole of warm regard for each other, and dissolve degrees!

During these days of writing, news has come of first one incident, then another, where the ordinary newspaper report, linked to experience, fired the imagination, so that it would have been very easy to carry the reader down there where great-hearted men toiled and risked to set men free, or, mayhap, to find their lifeless bodies. Now, this is not my plan here, but I would I were able to speak of the worth of such men in fitting language. They are no exception; they are just all built that way and their work and life go naturally to the building of them. This

week numbers of men have received the Industrial VC from the King as a tribute to their great gallantry below in toiling continuously, and at great risk to save some of their fellows who were trapped in a colliery near here. I had the privilege of showing them round the Houses of Parliament. How proud they were to see the place. A rare modesty and intelligence was theirs, but the Houses of Parliament have seldom been honoured with such distinguished guests who didn't know they were distinguished.

And to-day the news is of others in a pit near here, who worked many days, regardless of risks to save three who were all unfortunately dead when the rescuers reached them. The newspapers state that one of the dead had previously been entombed, but had got out safely on that occasion. His father and two brothers-in-law were lost in a great explosion two or three miles away, three years ago. The great grandfather, grandfather, and a cousin of another of the killed in the last-mentioned accident were all killed at the adjoining colliery.

Some have written of characters in mining villages, unsavoury characters, as though that was the miner. Some have written of the sporting kind, as though that was the miner. These exceptions we have just as other industries, professions, and classes have them, but they are only exceptions, and rare ones too. Miners are clean, intelligent, orderly, home-loving men. Their depth of thought, expressed in simple language, sometimes backed by amazing reading, will challenge comparison with any class in Great Britain. Knowing as I do the life and conduct below, and the character that goes with conduct on the surface, even the crudest among them humbles me. To think of them as a whole is to have a tightness at the throat, while the heroism of them and their women-folk in home matters, as well as the action below, increases admiration until it pains. Better and better have they grown in my lifetime in all those things that matter to men and nations.

To help to the understanding of such people I have tried to tell the story of one family.

This story was not written that I might write about myself. It has been the plain tale of an average working-class family, yesterday and to-day. That my story has run through it is not because of any worth, but because I was a member of that family, and could write of what I knew. So I have spoken little of the things in that wider world which has been open to me for years. If I worked in it, my mind was in the other world, where it belongs. I work in Parliament, and live in the centre of the mines, among my own. From this angle I look at life. "Narrow," you say. Yes, and deliberately so; for, though the ages and the world were mine through books from early life, and the wider sphere of affairs has been open to me in recent years, I have refused to be swamped by them, from whatever angle they might come, London will attack you with its many movements, and befog you with its many "isms," putting its nose in the air if you refuse to succumb. This does not apply, of course, to the London masses, who to my knowledge have been magnificently kind to miners in the day of strikes and trouble. But it is easy to be named with the smart men about the "political" town if you will yield. To refuse is to be provincial, or merely industrial. So be it. I am all these and more, if anyone wishes; for first and last it is the life, work, and people I know, that is the fibre of me. And my family is a microcosm of the whole.

A strong, aged woman, almost burly, a slight built man of good speech living in an Aged Miners' Home of beauty, with trim flower-beds in front and well-kept garden behind. Brothers and sisters doing their work in pits, about the pits, and now scattered about in other working-class homes.

Mother passed while I was a Member of Labour's second Government as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour in 1929. I have already spoken of the way of it, how she went taking in her arms the beloved one whom

she had lost on the way and secretly, deeply mourned. With her passing, her life partner refused to be comforted. He would live alone. In the last year or two he had cleaned and cooked, as he well could. Anything to ease her lot. We tried to bring him out of it, but the home where both had lived was sacred. In time, my brother George got him away to his own home. About the village he told his tales, surrounded always by interested, wondering listeners. But always we knew he had ceased to live. Unexpectedly we would come upon him in tears when, as if ashamed, he would hide himself for a while. Then later he would confess that he missed his old mate. It was as if that deep affection, so seldom manifested in word, was always centred where she lay. So he, too, after a short time went to join her with a smile.

"I'll soon be comfortable, and very happy up there beside my old lass," were almost his last words.

Thus passed two of the world's great ones, though the pages of history will not know them. Strong characters alone enabled them to weather through life's gales as well as its dull trying days. Little of the world's goods was theirs, but never could anyone pierce the armour of their self-reliance with gifts, not even their sons and daughters. They had given so long that they knew not how to receive. You have read their history and know the simplicity of their lives, yet they left a little for others when life was finished. They were ever happy, and if there was a place wherein a man could rest the soles of his feet on this earth, it was in that little Miners' Home where they spent the evening of their lives.

Multitudes seek, with much to help them in the seeking, what my parents found with little. And no sons and daughters of men anywhere, in any age, are prouder of their forebears than we of our family are of ours.

My good fortune in life has been to be of such parents, and to know many more; for my parents were simply of a type which is more common than most people think.

We see their homely figures, and pass on, hardly making distinction because they all look alike. Unknown, unnamed, yet giants. While standing at the pit gates of Boldon early one morning, I noticed groups of men standing about. On enquiry, I found they were night-shift men, who, having finished their work, were waiting for their bus to take them home. They were all clean and dressed. They had bathed at the pit top—these baths were a change for the good which was all too long in coming. One man came talking to me familiarly.

"What is your name?" I asked. He seemed amazed that I did not know, for he had been a driver lad when I was a putter. Then I knew him.

"Do you remember Geordie Fletcher?" he asked, as his eyes brightened. Then he told the others of Geordie, as though he told a tale from Homer. A tale of courage and daring done as though it was nothing. And Geordie, like many others, was mauled in the battle of the pit, and died as courageous as he had lived. I went back to the tent near the sea where the wife and I had walked together in the days of old, and where I had cooked mussels to eat with dry bread as a boy—where we always spend any holidays that may come our way. I wondered how it came to pass that I live, while Geordie had long since died. So does every pitman wonder. I coned over the many times when a fraction of an inch had stood between me and cleaving, crushing, death-dealing tons of stone, and then of my present condition. Life and death are very uneven in their dealings, so that none of us have much to say for ourselves. Away there on the horizon were the ships, as of old, loaded with coal and timber, one warily working her way into port. The gulls sailed and wheeled in the air, some hovering just over the waves watching for their morning meal. The "Holey Rock," where I had so often played, going in and out of its mystery-drawing, secret places, stood like the remains of some old abbey. All that rugged coast was mine in its splendour as it was everybody's. And even from there

the pits could be seen. But out here were the open things, with the salt of the sea, and the lung-satisfying salt of the air. There at the door stood the wife, who would have the bacon sizzling when I came out after the plunge in the life-giving waters. Then would come my friends from collieries to talk, as we sat around, of the day's work and its difficulties.

Then along the coast, wandering aimlessly with the wife, as we did in the years gone by, getting ready for the next round of life, she to her multifarious activities inside the home and out of it, and I for the varying round of duties.

From sea to sea had I gone with the mine in between. Of like lives, of like mind were we. Our dreams had not yet come true, but we had done many things we wanted, and some good things we never expected to do. But there all round were the things which were life. And, in spite of the conflict, and life's disappointments, the intimate knowledge of sad things, we had friends who were as the good wine of life. Also, we yet had each other—and our dreams.

CHAPTER XXXI

Twelve Years Later

TWELVE YEARS HAVE PASSED. SIXTY-TWO YEARS OF AGE and blessed among men. Strong in body, heart good, eye and mind clear. Sometimes I think that long line of forbears who went down to the seas in ships have passed on to me so much salt that the body is preserved and the years beat against it in vain. I know this is vanity and old Father Time has a twinkle in his eye as I write. . .

But it is a fact that only a year ago I went to China in a round about way by land, plane and sea-plane, travelling

there and back 35,000 miles, and there was never a seedy moment from beginning to end.

Unbearable heat in Africa, an hour or two later freezing cold 12,000 feet in the air—all I wanted was something to eat!

Praise be to that great mother of mine and the tough gentleman who was my father. Though I lay no claim to special virtues, I can say I have done what was in my power to sustain, build up and preserve what was given to me.

Was it Ibsen who said:—

‘ It is the Will alone that matters,
The Will that mars and makes
The Will that no distraction shatter
And that no resistance breaks ’

Often have I failed and mourned my failure, and I think I know now why the saints of old flogged themselves with whips.

Fast and soft I have never did any good for man or woman nor for any nation. It is wise to put Will in the saddle. When we do it is like galloping over the heath with wind in the face: but we so seldom go for a gallop.

In April, 1939, I was asked by the Rt. Hon. Sir John Anderson, M.P., to accept the post of Deputy-Commissioner for Civil Defence in the Northern Region. At the same time Tom Johnstone, M.P., now Secretary of State for Scotland, was invited to become Commissioner for Scotland. We both accepted on our own conditions.

Mr. Chamberlain was then Prime Minister. We did not agree with his policy, but we knew war was coming. Neither Mr. Chamberlain's appeasement policy, nor any combination of wisdom or power on this earth could divert those German leaders from their purpose. Knowledge, experience and instinct within me cried aloud that fact.

Those years before the war! One long nightmare. It is an appalling thought that the young of our generation

have never known peace in the proper sense of the word. Threats of war were their daily fare long before war came. Hitler and Mussolini screamed War by broadcast. Films of their marching millions obtruded themselves after a hard day's work. Newspaper headlines—War—War—War.

That is what this generation was almost born to. Conciliation, yielding, retreating only made the issue more certain. It is a dreadful thing to know you can no more stop the coming carnage of youth than you can stay the stars in their courses. The peaceful were counted as degenerate by the Fascists, decent conduct merely emphasised it further. The nations were ripe for the Reaper: Death was already on his White Horse.

You have read how I loathed war and was under no illusion about its social consequences. The years only intensified my hatred. But the wholesale killing of good men, the concentration camps, the tortures, the degradation of women and children, the flouting of liberty and the mobilisation of all human achievements for the destruction of those who held to the literature, faith and religion upon which the vision and the dream of human progress was founded—that was death. There was only one way. To prepare to meet it, and I had no hesitation in my mind once the issue was clear.

In a Parliamentary sketch now in my possession and written in April, 1936, I wrote "War is coming as sure as night follows day." It was entitled "Watch Winston," and these words were written of him who was then a voice crying in the wilderness. "Now that he is further off the chief place in the government than he has ever been before, he is nearer to it than he has ever been." The Editor of the paper rang me up in 1942 and asked me if I remembered the article. I said I did. "You were a prophet" he said. "Yes, a minER prophet" was my reply. The article was in the *Sunday Sun* for April 26th, 1936.

What I thought of Mr. Chamberlain was one thing: the need for preparing shelters and succour for the people

among whom my life had been spent, was another thing. So I undertook the task, along with my friend Sir Arthur Lambert as Commissioner. Later when the National Fire Service was established—Colonel C. J. Pickering joined us as an extra Deputy Commissioner. My Commissioner and my fellow Deputy have not only been good colleagues but warm friends. With the local authorities of Northumberland, Durham and North Riding, shelter for some two million people had to be prepared. This was, of course, chiefly the work of the local authorities under Regional authority.

After care for the bombed people—a multitude of services—had to be provided. Women's Voluntary Services and every social, industrial and political organisation and influence in the Region had to be mobilised. Some day I hope to write its full story. All I can say here is that as the organisation was built up stage by stage, one learned how great was the apprehension of grim things to come among public men and women as well as the average citizen.

When war came and then the fall of Dunkirk, that narrow belt of land across northern England was a danger point of invasion. Then it was we saw the stuff of the people. Trade Union leaders, employers, local councillors and M.P.'s sat in council with Army, Navy and Air Commanders, and I know those responsible Service leaders will pay tribute to the high sense of responsibility, courage and wisdom of those men and women. Mr. Mark Hodgson of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress was the link between the Regions and the Headquarters of the Unions of Great Britain. And a sage valuable adviser to us he was. But every leader of the workers was willing and eager to help. We had no direct authority over industrial workers, but with the warm co-operation of their leaders we knew what we would and could do under any conceivable set of conditions that might arise. The regional representatives of the Ministries of Labour, Transport, Food, Works, Health, Home Office, Treasury

and every unit of the British Government with those of the local authorities and the unions, worked in complete unity with the Region as the connecting link. It was a complete provincial government to act on its own initiative in case of being cut off from London. And we were confident that the well worked out plans would operate to the most minute detail whatever came, whether attempted invasion or large scale attack by air.

We expected the attack hourly and knew not the issue of it, for we knew only too well the weakness of our defences. The Service Chiefs told us the whole truth for they realised those men and women could stand it: also keep it. All the cards were on the table.

Neither the Union nor the local authority representatives left the people for whom they spoke under any illusion and never was trust in the unknown more justified. The man who could forget those days and those people would be mentally poor indeed.

Bombing began. Middlesbrough was the first industrial town to be bombed in England. How would the people bear it? Bear it! We went to comfort and were comforted. It then seemed incredible. But that was a foretaste of what was to come. London showed later of what stuff the people were made. And no part of Britain has failed to keep the standard.

Is it vain to be British? If so *I* am vain. Scenes! I could make you laugh and weep. Stories! Books of them. Oh wonderful men, women and children of this land. "If I forget thee, if I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning." That goes for bombed Britain.

Offers of other work were made to me. But: Well I knew my duty lay in the north. All my life and experience seemed to have been a preparation for that. Anyhow, direct contact with living men and women in the rough and ready life of a strenuous industrial community is as the breath of my nostrils. It was not for anyone else to decide. One must do what one must. So I stayed in the north.

Parliament only sat for three days. The other four were spent in the Region, and when bombing was heavy in my area I stayed there.

Meanwhile the little lady with the good grey eyes, whose hair also is now grey, was active as ever and tireless. She's indiarubber—I do believe she bounces along the road. Welfare, War Savings, Labour Sections, Parish Council, Women's Voluntary Service—she takes them all in her stride—I mean bounce. Don't mistake me. The house is always "bonny" and my slippers always in their place. In spring and summer the flowers are in the window boxes and our two allotments in good shape. The allotments are supposed to be mine—but just see her with a spade! Praise her cabbages and leeks, or potatoes or tomatoes, and you can have as much as you like of that tasty "something" cooking in the oven. There never was such a woman. She will laugh when she reads this.

Late in life a boy came our way. All babies are wonders. But a baby boy when you think you've got the family off your hands! He was a lovely little fellow and which of us was most silly it is difficult to say. He would lie and look at the "sturtiums" in the window boxes, and we would look at him. When he walked he ran. I think he never did walk.

As for me I bought that many things too big for him, or not right for him that I became the butt of the house. I do believe that lad laughed at me. Still it was worth while watching him trying to get into my bag to see what new thing I had brought.

"Maam"—that's the wife—took him as a baby to sit beside her in the Welfare. He knew *which* baby wanted *what* by the time he could toddle. He really was a wonder—was Clive. They are all wonders to their own. Every mother and father knows the story. The bairns make us young—foolishly young. We watch their first faltering steps, and tears when they fall; join in their laughter and share in their vanity when the feet are firm on the ground. Out of doors and little games grip, until they droop and .

sleep is heavy upon them. Then comes the story and that sleep which only children know.

Was there ever such a tale as Cinderella? And . . . well you know them all. As for the wooden horse of Troy it has no equal for growing boys. The idea that men should make a horse like the one Santa Claus sent. Only, as big as big! When those men pushed that wooden horse up to the gates of Troy and ran away—how silly. Almost as silly as the men of the city who pulled it inside the gates. When those concealed inside the horse jumped out—that was something to shout about. That wooden horse was a real winner and had to do his stuff time and time again.

“ Billy Billy Bigfellow
He's gone to bed.”

Not much of a poem, rather doggerel—but still it was nice to write it—and to receive it in a letter from Daddy—a letter all for Clive himself. He was getting on. So were we.

I kept a diary of his days, his growth, ways, strength, weakness. Like a sculptor shaping his subject so was I. And no artist was ever so lost in his subject. Here was pay for all the work of the years. One could see it shaping, growing, beginning to gleam. Here was a real upstanding man for the world. Never was there such a one—in spite of the knowledge that it had all been done before by millions of fathers and mothers.

It is wise to laugh at oneself now and then.

When war came Clive was seven years of age. Strong, fair, skin like a peach, very intelligent—bigger^r than his years. Never walked, always ran. Chest out, shoulders back—a born athlete. He would do anything for anyone, go anywhere. And he certainly could look after himself at school.

In 1941 he was nine years old. In the last year the Germans dropped bombs near us again and again.

We always expected them at full moon. Down they came at—though just over the chimney tops—then a whistling, an explosion, and the blast. Four times they did that—and the fourth. . . .! It was the time of the Bædecker Raids. The German's picked out of Bædecker's Guide, the cathedrals and famous buildings of Britain and deliberately came, night after night, to destroy them. And if any are left it is simply because our guns and fighter pilots frustrated their effort.

A night or two after York was bombed they returned to us. It was two o'clock in the morning. We just got downstairs when—whistling bombs, blasted windows, house rocking, roof collapsed. It was the end; so we thought. One fleeting thought of satisfaction shot through fear, as lightning zig-zags in the dense night; the feel of the warm body under both of us. Strange how instinctively parents fling themselves over their young at such times. I have seen a mother's body taken from her boy, a small fragile thing of seven. He had lived long hours under debris, the only one of six left in that family. Oh, motherhood sublime!

We escaped. In the dawn we heard the rattle and roar above where British fighters and German bombers battled to the death. So low that some swore they saw them. There was ruin all around but all were safe, And all wondered that it should be so. But . . .

The Bomb Squad were brought in. They examined the district and found nothing. Fearless men they are, skilled and careful, but they cannot work miracles. Who could detect a bomb deeply embedded, hidden under the foundations of a house not far from our own?

Strange have been the ways of unexploded bombs, as many know to their sorrow. Eighteen hours later there was a roar. Death and destruction came in a flash to our community.

A young miner gently pushed me aside as I stooped to lift the beloved body. I insisted: so did he. He knew. Who says the age of chivalry is dead? A neighbourly miner of swift instinctive understanding, firmly shielding the afflicted from further pain.

As to Maam. Already the injured, unconscious, moaning were being tended among the debris of our house. Her own in one room; the injured in another. And she rendered *them* first aid. "I knew I could do something for the living. I could do nothing for my own lad." That is what she said later.

* * * * *

In a shattered, windowless almost roofless house, in the light of a guttering candle we sat together that night. Life had steeled us for such hours as that: and we had seen so much in our time. Worse things had happened in all the world—also in Britain.

Suffering works strangely upon us, stirring men and women to great kindliness. So it was in our community. "They had all things in common."

Before we knew it we had adjusted ourselves. Houses had been completely destroyed. Some good neighbours killed. Scarcely a house was whole. But warm neighbourliness worked wonders. Such is the tale in many parts of Britain in those years.

It is scarcely meet to write of such things for so many have endured more, neither writing nor speaking of it. Thousands of mothers and fathers in this land have lost loved ones in ruined homes and on the field of battle. In many cases the loss was doubled, even trebled. They have lost—and are silent.

"See that man?" said a man to me one day as he pointed to another one passing. "He has lost three sons." Three! How petty are your troubles, which seemed so great, when you face a man like that knowing

his silent woe. We sit quiet, at peace; because *his* sons have died. And so many others.

Is it wrong that those who do not know should be reminded of the price of peace--and liberty? Should we be allowed to forget the young who have been robbed of life ere the dew and fragrance of the morning has passed from them? I think not. So, I have told this story which is that of so many. "There were a few casualties." That is what the wireless said. Sometimes it is a "town in the north-east." Ah, that town in the north-east! Some have perished there too, to preserve our heritage. That does not dim our faith nor cause us to falter in our task. Evil must be slain and the price must be paid. But all should know the price and remember it.

I was never under any illusion about war. I knew only too well that it brought out the mean and the sublime. The mean, as a rule, are on view; they refuse to be obscured. Even the Black Market men, though working secretly are known.

Yet these are few compared with the sublime. In these years it has been good to know so many of them. Asking neither pay nor honour, they give themselves without stint. Britain is full of them. They are so common that the mean stand out.

That is why Britain stood firm when the world seemed lost to the evil ones. So have we an unshakable faith in the triumph of good over evil, and dream our dreams of a new world when men and women and children live in peace and where war is a nightmare of the evil past.

Irene and Edna the two little girls I once held on my knee, with eyes wide at the tale that was told are now grown women and a younger one serves as a soldier, in the A.T.S. Alma is a gunner, and talks to me as though we only used bows and arrows in the last war. Guns are guns now: and soldiers are soldiers. Nearly three years she has served as a defender of this country.

Sons and daughters of sisters serve in Army and Air

Force in many lands—amazing results from that hard driven family with which this story began.

We lack many things but with liberty we can freely state our right to the things we lack. And the Lawson clan are not backward in using their liberty. Ours is no unusual story. It is merely that of Britain in the rough. A history of the unknown which finds little place in History.

The great Labour movement in which my life has been spent has proved worthy of these testing years. Its political and industrial leaders have carried great responsibilities—my old friend Clem Attlee, finest of men, one of the world's best informed, acting as Deputy to the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill.

In that hour when France fell and our young battled for life in the air, when invasion seemed a matter of hours, the influence and authority of working class leaders was a vital factor in the life of this nation. Without respect to Party or pre-conceived opinions, regardless of depressed areas, long years of unemployment and social neglect, the great organisation of Labour was placed at the disposal of the country. Millions of its members gave themselves to various tasks.

Experience unrivalled and influence beyond estimate helped to unite this nation as it has never been united in history. That was a miracle which astonished the world and confounded the enemy. They said democracy was effete and incapable of unity. And lo! They saw a nation solid as a rock standing unbattered, four square, almost defenceless, but defiant. Even those boastful of totalitarian perfection were daunted, awed and unsure of themselves. Winston Churchill was great in that hour, and he had a great people to lead.

A miracle came to pass. Men once forgotten were wanted. Also women. Depressed areas disappeared. Coal was wanted, ships, steel, guns, shells, ammunition, tanks, planes. The heavy industries were concentrated in depressed areas. A thing for the worldly wise to jibe at just yesterday. Coal is finished—nobody wants ships or

steel! And now! More coal and more. Give us ships. More steel. The heavy industries are everything. Will Britain forget that lesson? Will she forget the communities that almost perished and were discovered to be the life of the nation in her hour of need?

That is the question mark over Britain.

I have said the little girls of my early years have grown to womanhood. So it is. But there are others. A golden-haired grandchild, the image of her mother, who loves to cuddle in like the one of old. And one who crows, gurgles and laughs aloud at others, when she rides on grand-dad's shoulders. Who can translate that laughter to music."

Grow old along with me
The best is yet to be.'

And for rest a little corner in the kitchen when winter's wind rattles the window. Or in the room where the walls are lined with book. The best by themselves. Old friends who first found a rest on the orange box which mother gave me and father thought too big.

There is the stiff-backed Milton and ragged Gibbon and Tennyson the worse for wear and Shelley and Byron. And there is Lamb with his "Dream Children," beside old Shakespeare. Oh yes, and the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius the Emperor who would have saved that other celluloid Emperor—Mussolini—much trouble had he read him, instead of foxy Machiavelli. And there is the "Imitation of Christ" written by the old monk, Thomas, who lived a thousand years after Marcus. Also the worn Bible from which I learned long ago that "He leadeth me beside still waters", of which the years have taught me the truth. For it must be truth if experience has worked it into your being so that it is the hard core of you. So comes Faith, and that real rest which lies in the deeps of the spirit; from whence spring the dream and the vision. Sirens may scream and bombers blast, sorrows may come and the sights of war scar the landscape. but I know as sure

